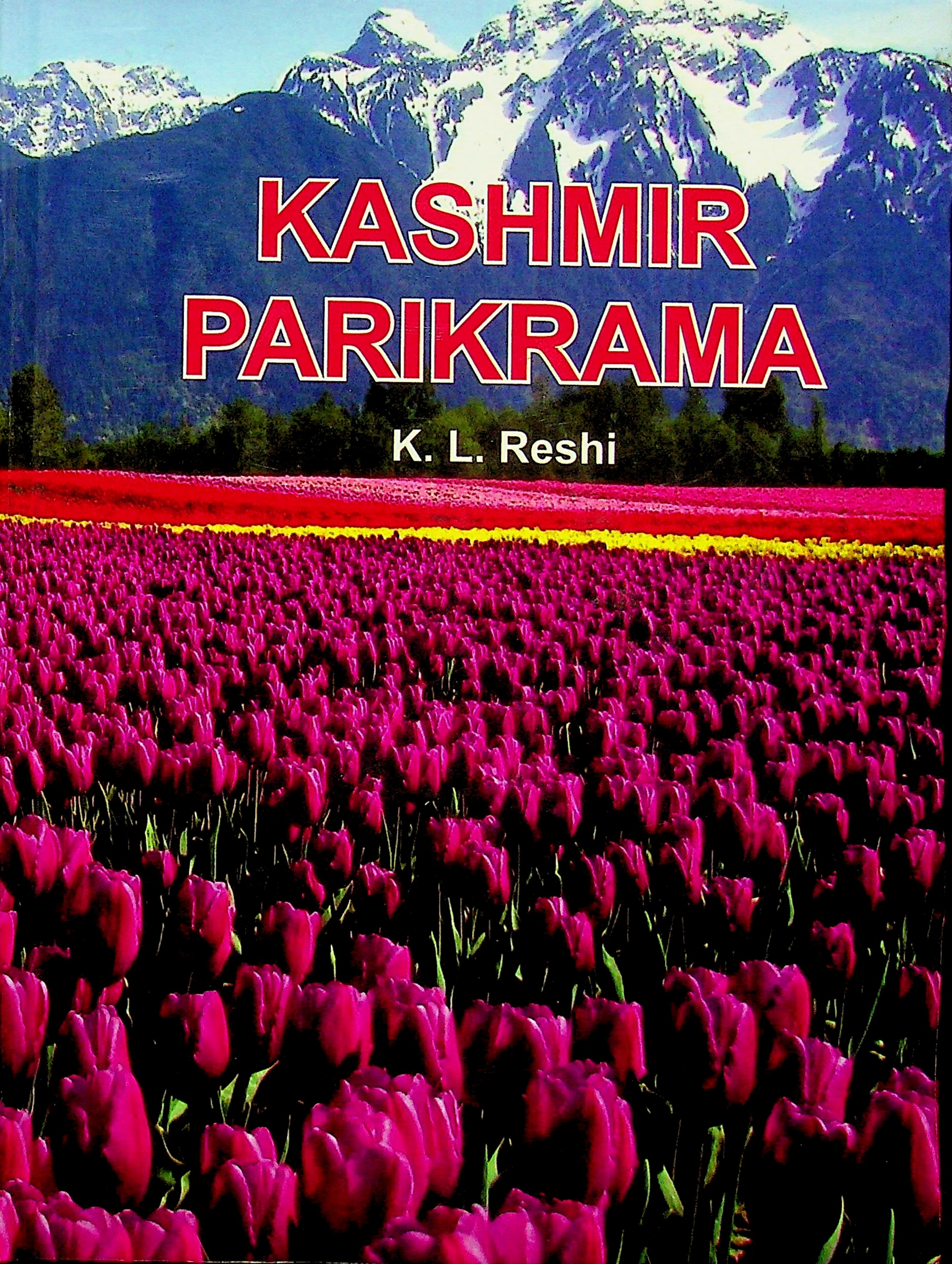
KASHMIR PARIKRAMA

K. L. Reshi



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Kashmir Parikrama

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Preface/Author's Introduction

A man once dropped in at a place, where author was staying as an allotee. The visitor was given a due welcome. After exchange of pleasantries, the visitor showed his keenness to know about the welfare of those of his friends with whom he had once lived so happily. The two acquaintances were soon lost in sweet reminiscences. The meeting proved so touching that it revived the latent warmth of their bygone days. The author felt an instant urge of visiting his place of birth. A few days later, he chanced to slip out of his office, boarded a mini-bus and reached the place un-noticed. It was here that he had spent the best part of his life. Though, everything had changed since his forced displacement, there was no one to recognize or welcome him, yet he felt some invisible force that set his soul into vibration. He had a sudden flashback of the all the past events, which ultimately gave him the reason to take up this endeavour.

It took him almost a decade to present the contents in the shape of a text. He knew that there had been an inordinate delay in the timely publication, which for obvious reasons has taken some sheen out of the contents. But then, it was ordained to be so, for certain unfortunate events followed in succession in the life of the author. Such a circumstantial distraction did result in the stalemate of the project for a moment. However, the constant persuasions of those dedicated so intensely to the cause of preserving cultural heritage of Kashmir encouraged him in keeping his interest alive. In-fact, it was this infused and inspiring power source that paved the way and finally resulted in bringing out the text, though belatedly.

Krishna, the character, filling the void, had to be invented for providing a necessary link that could connect varied subjects, which otherwise would have appeared loosely woven. First three chapters are more-or-less committed to bakhti/ devotion and love expected of a young and innocent mind, but as the character grows, he begins to experience complexities of life, which forces him to observe world through aided eyes, element of wisdom rules over his devotion/ bakhtibava. Therefore, readers need to be patient and not come to an early conclusion. The author would like to add here that this character depiction is both a fiction as well as a reality; rather a

fictional coating of various real life experiences, which does serve the desired purpose. There may be an apparent gap between two phases of this composition. However, in complimentary situations; reader has the liberty to draw his/her own conclusion. So far as the descriptions of the expeditions, episodes/ events are concerned, most of these are derived from personal inputs, of-course, with some exceptions, which do find passage through Krishna, the character, whose role has to be appreciated in the back drop of the varied situations that the compiled matter carries with it.

The text includes portrayals or the biographical sketches of some great sages and saints, description of old historical and religious sites, environmental degradation and its aftermath and last but not the least the expeditions and tours to various not so easily approachable, or so to say, not as familiar as other places in the regions, where Nature is at its best. Since, the text also contains compilation of certain historical facts, which may already be known to the readers, yet the presentation of the events of a particular period in a condensed form is something that may attract the interest of the reader afresh. An attempt has also been made at interpreting the term "mythology" in relation to history with definite purpose. It may be pertinent to mention here that the topics discussed at length, have been the result of constant research. References to sources have been given at appropriate places. Citing of incidents from history or defining indigenous religious thoughts or referring to the socio-political ties at any particular period of time, have been put forth with all care. At times, the consolidated material had to be recompiled after going through of papers and travelogues, wherever the details could not be presented in one go or in one proper sequence (viz-a- viz specific to any particular topic), the content was arranged as the situation demanded and also as per the requirement of the subject. Hopefully, one expects a positive response from the readers.

Prior to his displacement from Srinagar in 1989-90, the author had the occasion of travelling to various places referred to in the text, with a few exceptions, where adoption of secondary source of information became necessary. As for instance, in the case of expedition to Harmukh, narrated to the author by his father, who was amongst the first to visit the place after 1947. Again, in respect of the pilgrimage to Shardha Devi, certain catchy details were gathered by the author from his elders, who would take pleasure in

sharing their experiences on such subjects of interest with enthusiastic youths.

This book intends to provide an insight into the socio-political environment that the community of Kashmiri Pandits had lived in, prior to their forced displacement. The parikrama begins with a brief description of the places around a locality in down town area, called Iskanda Bhawan; a place with rich historic background. Although, the exodus of K.PS does not form the subject matter of this book, yet some thoughtful material has been included to expose the planned procreation of the vested interests and vicious circles involved at various levels, political or otherwise, whose calculated and cunning moves, did not only prove detrimental to the interests of the displaced community, but also jammed their survival instincts. An insight into a premeditated/ planned strategy followed in the execution of the ethnic cleansing of the aborigines from the land of their birth, simply reveals that such a policy had had an active support of both moderates as well as the radicals amongst Kashmir centric political circles right from 1947 or even prior. In-fact, the mass exodus in 1989-90 has been, but a continuation of this process, the description of which would have been the replica of what a well-known Bangladeshi writer had already described in one of her books on the plight of Hindu community in a predominately Muslim populated area, very similar to what happened in Kashmir. Ever-widening gap and missing commonality between two contradictory ideologies, both distinct in nature, with no meeting point, as rightly believed by most of the valley based majority community members, makes it easy to understand the root cause of speculative grouse that the divisive forces nourished against the displaced community. No wonder then that their designs were always directed at cutting this community to size and reducing it to such an insignificant level, where members would feel belittled and totally discarded. The perpetrators have already succeeded in their game plan by sealing all the routes for the future survival of the community. Warnings that had repeatedly been ignored by the members of the minority community, who often behaved like ostriches, hiding the head in sand and avoiding confrontation with imminent dangers that were to engulf them some day all in the state of unawareness.

Author has tried to provide the rationale explanations, before arriving at the conclusions regarding the significance of political

movements that have influenced the course of Kashmir history. The source of references: Viz; books, manuscripts, periodicals or relevant reading material used in the process of study and subsequent compilation of written accounts have specifically been recorded, wherever needed. Viewpoints on theosophical subjects or indigenous religious thoughts have been taken up after going through the relevant study material and papers published by various scholars from time to time. At times the description has been reshaped and limited or restricted to suit the content without destroying the basic essence of the content. Yet, to err is human; It is author's resolve that in next edition, efforts to improve would be made, wherever and whenever any inadvertent oversights are pointed out by the august readers.

The subject matter of this type, aptly poses a formidable challenge, especially, while confronting the looming impediments. Nevertheless, it was a stake worth taking. It may not be out of place to mention that a proper sequential pattern, for the description of the events, may appear not to have been followed while trying to accommodate important personalities, events, their timings and associated places. At times description may not have fit in well, which can be contributed to the visible departure from the style in vogue. But then the author had hardly any other choice.

In the end, the intent behind this text should act as a catalyst creating interest of the future progeny in the roots they belong to. Being optimistic, the author believes in the axiom," When winter sets in, spring is not far behind," History is witness to the fact that the members of the displaced community have on number of occasions survived the onslaught and hopefully the present phase would pass, making a passage for the new beginning to usher in soon. Despite, knowing fully well, that the alien theology of late has successfully managed to replace the indigenous age-old traditions, refined cultural and well defined social and religious order, the author still maintains positivity. Time alone can tell, whether the community in exile would once again rise to the occasion, face the odds as before and take the fight for justice to the logical end.

With the blessings of my parents,

I dedicate This Book to my wife,

My youngest sister,

ALL RELATIVES

&

The entire Reshi family

Acknowledgements

Greatly inspired and influenced by a magnificent book titled "Monuments of Kashmir", written by Late R.C. Kak, (Ex- Prime Minister of J&K State, prior to partition), author expresses his gratitude and acknowledges his debt to this great statesman for the excerpts he had to adopt from his quoted book, the contents of which are amazingly vivid in description, aptly relevant to the topic and decisively authentic. Admiring his skill and foresight, author has all praise for Kak Sahib's efforts in reaching out to all the important archeological sites in the valley in absence of any viable transport facilities and motorable roads then. The present book is in-fact, a tribute to this great man of rare intellect and technical competence. The author submits that' "Paradise Reconnaissance /Kashmir Parikrama", is a modest effort at reviving the traditions that Late Kak Sahib had set in. Again, the author is also indebted to Prof. K.N.Pandita, a noted academician and a Scholar of great repute, whose translation of Persian book titled "A Muslim Missionary in Mediaeval Kashmir," is an eye opener to those, who claim that conversion of Kashmiris to Islam in Mediaeval period was voluntary and an outcome of simple discources. Author admits that his book would have been incomplete and the particular chapter inconclusive without the adoption of a summarized passages from Dr. Pandita's book which helped him in establishing a link between Shia settlement of present times at Zadibal with the area that Shams-ud-din Araki' had been gifted to by Musa Raina in endowment . His book confirms that Araki had played the main role in converting the local populace to Islam, in accordance with the traditions of Nurbakshi sect of Shia Muslims. Consequently, his involvement in the destruction of religious sites, splendid temples and rich libraries, is clear indication of whether conversion would have happened willingly or otherwise.

This book also contains number of descriptions that find source in various books and journals and as such the author feels indebted to all those writers, who find their names mentioned in the text. He cannot conclude without acknowledging the assistance that he was provided with by his kith and kin, his family members including his brother-in-laws, sisters , cousins, colleagues, relatives and friends and in particular his wife late Vijay, who was responsible for

encouraging him for taking up this assignment . She even collected Vaks of Lal Ded, (A cassette of vaks sung by Pt. Amber Nath ji), transcribed the material in to Hindi. He cannot help mentioning the tremendous support that he received from his brothers, namely; Late Sh. Chand Ji Kadalbajoo, S/Sh. S.L Raina (Reshi), JK Raina (Reshi), P.L.Raina, Anil Reshi, Sunil Reshi, Manoj Reshi and their friends, in particular, Rohit Pandit, all of whom undertook the risk in visiting certain places that the author could not go personally. They also provided him with some rare photographs in addition to his own collection that helped him in his effort to add live elements to the project. The author, during his service tenure, was out of way helped by his colleagues, namely S/Sh. Radhey Shyam, Madan Lal Sharma, Pawan Kumar and a very dedicated computer assistant, most probably Fayaz Ahmed or/Aashiq by name, who helped him in computerizing the portion of the project work. The author is thankful to Mr. Farooq from police telecom for providing him with a booklet on Dastgeer sahib written in Urdu.

In the end the author expresses his sincere thanks to Sh. Bushan Kuchroo, Dr. K.L Choudhary, Dr. M.K. Kadalbajoo and Sh. V.K. Kashkari for sparing the most precious moments in going through the draft of this book. The author was greatly encouraged by the comments and recommendations of Dr. Choudhary.The Author also extends thanks to his friends, Mr. AK Koul Ex-SE (electrical), Mr. B. L. Kashkari, Sh. A.K Koul, Mr.Kamlesh Tufchi, Sh. MN Kachroo, Sh. M. K. Safia, Sh. Surrinder Hashiya, Sh. Sanjay Razdan (A.G Office), Sh. Yogesh ji Kuchroo and in particular Shri PL Koul (Budgami) and Pt Sarwanand Ji Qazifor their valuable guidance.

Reshi K.L

Contents

Chapter I

Exploring HIS Lovely Neighbourhood

— Kumara Asthapana

Born in down town area of Srinagar city, Krishna had his roots in a locality called Khanda Bhawan. The area was blessed with a shrine dedicated to Lord Kumara, (The elder son of Lord Shiva). The deity, Kumara also known to the people by various other names, like Iskanda, Skanda, Kartikay or Subrmaniyam. Evidently, the region around the shrine assumed the name of Iskhanda Bhawan/ Skanda Bhawan, which with the passage of time had a distortion from Iskanda Bhawan to Khanda-Bhawan. A large number of devotees would visit the shrine for offering prayers, especially, on certain religious occasions, till recent past. Kalhan Pandit in his greatest historical treatise "Raj-Tarangini" gives an exciting description of this place.

Incidentally, its adjoining areas also possess distinct social, cultural and historical backdrop. For instance, Budh-gheer reminds us of the Buddhist period in Kashmir, while Bulbul-Lanker is a place associated with the saint Bulbul Shah Sahib, who was virtually the first missionary to introduce Islam in Kashmir.

(Some Muslims in individual capacity might have visited the valley before the arrival of Bulbul Shah Sahib, but their presence must have hardly been felt, either because of the limited nature of their activities or lack of the overall impact of their personality on the society.)

Similarly, places like Rangteng, Batyar, Gratabal, Batthapuran, Tarbal, Reshan Vihar, Sakidafer, Narvorha and many other localities, have also some shredded pages of history buried underneath, which provide an access to the valuable material for detailed analyses and focused studies. As per one legend, hundred and one odd springs existed in the area between Batyar and Sakidafer, which also included the two springs within Kumara Asthapan in not so distant past. Natural oozing of water from most of these springs would quite often take the form of a rivulet. At one such place called Grateh-Balh, the discharge was so forceful that it could run number of water mills

simultaneously. *Hence, the name connotes.* (Here, *Grateh; stands for* grinding mill and *BALH;* the place or power).

Before the advent of Islam in Kashmir, probably, in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, when Hindu rule was at the verge of total collapse, Iskanda Bhawan became a place of great prominence, not only on account of the existing Kumara Shrine and the religious significance, but also for the big palaces that had lately come up at the place for the then Patrani (The Queen of Queens). In fact, the royal activities had given boost to the development of the place. The Kumara shrine, which stood in an open area, spreading over fairly a large piece of land, had a dense forest grown all around with two fresh water springs in the middle of sanctum sanatoria, which provided all serenity to the spot. One of these springs is said to have existed till the end of nineteen century. Around this time, some unknown Muslim traveller, probably a Mullah, whom people later on knew by the name of Malbaab, while on his way from some far off village, happened to stop here. Being tired, he wanted to take rest for a while and therefore went inside the shrine, which still formed a part of the dense forest. After tiresome journey during the day, he must have felt slight feverish, which forced him to extend his stay for the night. But in the morning, when he woke up, he did not have the mind to leave the place. He ultimately decided to reside there and thus made the place his home. He died some time later and was most probably buried within the premises. A mosque was built there and the place henceforth assumed the name of Malbaab sahib's Masjid.

The elderly people in the locality would often talk about an influential family amongst Muslims, who had come to live in the close vicinity of the Shrine. The family had acquired a piece of land by the side of this shrine and subsequently had a big residential house built there. It is probable that they might have indulged in plugging the then only existing spring within the shrine. Perhaps, such an act must have been an outcome of their domestic compulsion. People say that they filled the spring with building waste and crushed stone pieces. While the process of plugging was on, water from the source did find a loose spot for its discharge and thus rushed out with a great force that almost flooded the entire area in no time. They say that it was with great difficulty that the family finally succeeded in sealing the leak. Though the task thus executed had

left hardly any trace of once existing source of water, yet some time later, the family did face some misfortune. They might have realized that they had definitely committed a sin against the Nature, which was evident from the fact that the family offered Namaze Shukrana, at the instance of some sagacious person in their clan. These prayers were followed by altering of goats on the spot. Pieces of sacrificial meat were distributed amongst poor to please the God, the custom prevailing in Muslims even today. From that day onwards, the shrine that one may call as Kumara Asthapana or Malbaab Sahib's mosque started shrinking in area. Presently, there is only a small piece of land left between the Mosque and the building, bearing testimony to once existing big jungle. One can see variety of wild grown shrubs and herbs inside the left over plot. In the centre of the piece of land lies a rectangular stone raised base, a metre or so in height, looking like a mound from above, perhaps, the site of once existing one of the two springs. A stone slab, which people in Kashmir call as Peur, has lately made an appearance at the top surface of the Mound, perhaps to emphasize that Malbaab Sahib was buried at the spot.

Krishna's Grandparents would tell that water oozed at times from the rectangular shaped base structure. Hindus of this area used to light the earthen-ware lamps (Dias) at the edges of the rectangular structure on religious occasions, especially, on Kumar sheshtis and Kartik purnimashi. Krishna does recall that during his childhood days, his family would offer prayers almost every evening by lighting diyas on Damdhr, (lighting of lamps on the base of the window frames) of the room, facing the shrine.



'Kumar Asthapana/ MalBaab Sahib's Mosque'

Now, with a change here and a change there, the shrine seems to have lost the Nature's touch. The sides, open earlier, have been walled. A private school building has come up within the side walls, just on the back side of the Mosque. Previously, the front wall had small windows with the stone Pinjras fitted in them; where devotees would keep oil lamps burning in the tiny rectangular spaces carved for the purpose. There were number of pegs to hold the small donation boxes fixed against the wall. However, a big iron safe supported by a meshed iron railings inserted into base raised on smoothly cut stones in cement has replaced the old setting. A gate has also been erected in the middle of this half mesh half stone walling, which forms an entrance to the still unutilized portion of the shrine, where from one can have a clear view of the rectangular mound.

Krishna recalls the celebrations of yearly Urs of Malbaab Sahib falling on third day of Eid-ul-Zuha. Prior to 1990 turmoil, it was an occasion with lot of excitement to witness. Lamps would be lit on all sides of the mosque. A temporary market place would come up for several days, where a large number of items would be displaced for sale. In addition to it, Gamblers too participated in the festivity by occupying suitable places for setting up their game counters. One such game comprised of a small earthenware pot placed at the centre of the base of the bucket containing water. The game would start with the stake taker immersing the coin into the bucket full of water. The deciding stake was that the coin should go down the water straight into the mouth of the earthen ware pot. Obviously, a target set at the bottom of the bucket was to delude the stake taker. All such items at the display formed the attractions of the Urs and thus added to all round hustle and bustle, In fact, the road passing through the middle of Iskanda Bhawan would be brisk with activity for days before and after the Urs.

Before moving on to the next phase of this description, the narrator wanted to share an interesting relationship that existed between Kumara Asthapana and the people of the area. The members of the family, who were responsible for plugging the spring during construction of their residential house, were in general noble and God fearing. On Fridays they used to distribute rice, cooked in turmeric water, mixed with edible oil, salt and fried garlic. It was probably, the gradual development of faith in the deity of the shrine that had helped the family in regaining the lost confidence after facing

some terrible misfortunes in the beginning of their settlement. They had, perhaps, learnt to live in harmony with Nature. This was quite obvious from the fact their house was covered with creepers from its base to the top including the portion of the iron sheet roof, which gave their house a distinct look.

People say that a snake would make frequent appearances in their house, an uncommon feature in Srinagar city. However, its appearance stopped for some time. Years later, an un-noticed small hole near the base of the front side of the building, facing the main road, was sighted, wherefrom the snake once again started making occasional appearances, rather a periodic occurance for some time. The snake would come out of the hole, make a parikrama, entertain the people by its mere presence, before gracefully making its entry back into its destined place, unmindful of the dangers that men could pose to the creature of its nature. Even Krishna as a boy bears witness to one such occasion. Pandits living in the area attributed it to Lord Shiva's grace and Muslims considered it a miracle. At times the snake would touch the milk offered by people in a walnut shell or in a small clean utensil, but it never hissed or harmed anyone. Why it stopped venturing out of its hole later on, is just a riddle. Here Krishna seeks temporary exit with a hope that description of next phase is presented in a refreshing air of the morning to follow.

Chapter II

Exploring the Sites Around

Krishna was probably aiming at reviving the social, cultural and historical backdrop of his native place and in *order to* accomplish this task, he commenced his journey from Khanda-Bhawan. He came out of the narrow lanes apparently in an aggressive mood, as if, to invade and recapture the lost territory, stopped at the crossing called Nawa-Kadal chowk, after brief halt, he chose to move along a lane on the left, precisely the east of 7th.Bridge over River Vitasta. The lane took him to Bul-Bul Lanker, a well-known historical place, associated with the first Muslim missionary preacher-cum-saint, Sharaf-ud-Din/Syed Abdur Rahman Turkistani, popularly known as Syed Bilall Shah or Bulbul Shah Sahib, who visited Kashmir during the reign of the last Hindu King, Raja Suhadeva by name. This King was soon to be replaced by a Ladakhi tribe's man, Ranchen Shah. The Buddhist invader, Ranchen, defeated and eliminated the Hindu king and established his kingdom in the early years of first decade of fourteenth century. On ascending the thrown of Kashmir, Ranchan Shah married the widowed queen. But, Lord of death did not spare him for a long and he died within months of his accession. But not before, the well-travelled Musavi Sayyid from Turkistan; Syed Bulbul shah, the great soul, a close witness to the struggle and transition of power, succeeded easily in impressing the victorious ruler Ranchen and subsequently, converted him to Islam by virtue of his simplicity of style, experience and powerful personality.

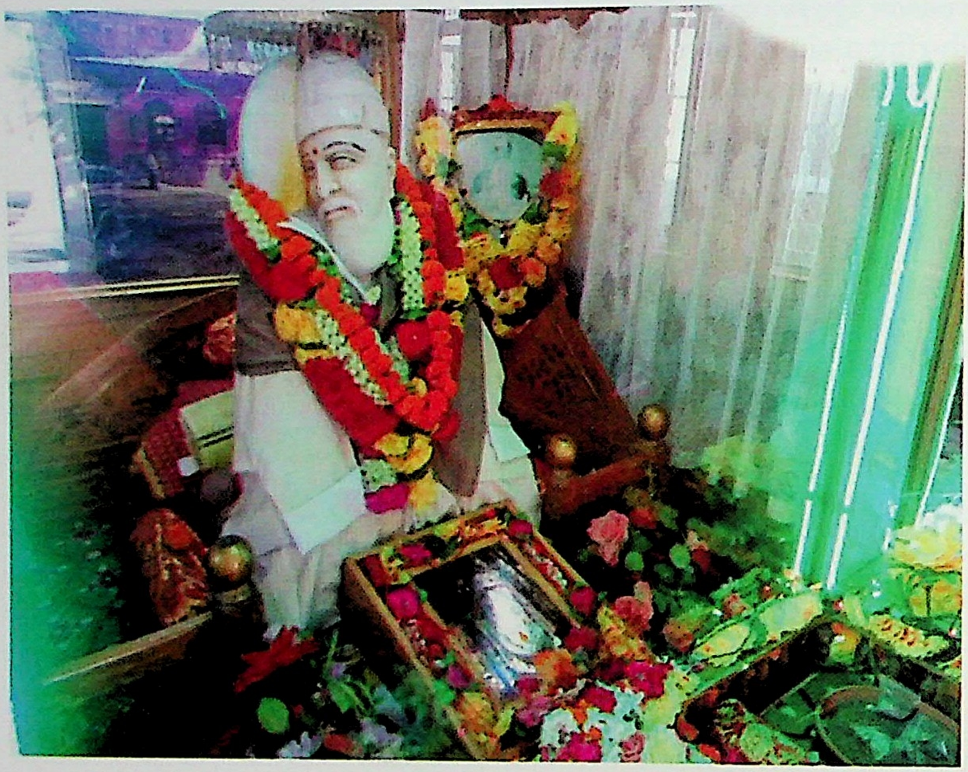
Ranchen became the first convert Muslim ruler, who under the name of Sultan Sadar-ud-din, laid the foundation of Muslim Rule in Kashmir. He had great respect for Bulbul Sahib, quite evident from the fact that he got a Langer/ free community kitchen established and dedicated to the cause, which Sayyid firmly stood for. After Ranchen's death, his body remains were put to rest in the close vicinity of this Langer. (His Makhbra lies on a small piece of land adjacent to Bulbul Sahib's Shrine. The two sites, Makhbra and Shrine are separated by a small and narrow lane).

Late Sh. R.C.Kak makes an apt observation in his book "Monuments of Kashmir". He quotes that Ranchen was earlier denied

entry by Brahimns into their fold, who later on took it on to himself, to teach them a suitable lesson. Thus, it could have been an obvious reason for a significant number of conversions of Hindus to Islam during a short span of Ranchen's reign. In-fact, his brother-in-law, who was also his commander-in-chief, played a dominant role in forcing thousands of Kashmiris to embrace new religion. Some people say that he indulged in such acts, as snatching and setting the sacred threads (jenyu) on fire. A stone slab, which they say did exist in the Shrine till recently, was used for the purpose of burning Janeyu and even beheading those who tried to resist. But, rightly said what Ranchen Shah and his associates did, was undoubtedly a befitting reply to the adamant, haughty and unimaginative Brahamins of that time. Ranchen's brother-in-law turned out to be more ardent follower of Bulbul Shah than Ranchen himself. He established a religious centre permanently on a piece of land, perhaps a temple site earlier. From here the spread of new faith was carried out along with Langer facility to boast the morale of neophytes. Later on this centre came to be known as Bulbul Lanker (Lanker a distorted version of the term Langer). Centuries later, when the Shrine was under renovation by Shrine Management Committee, stone idols were reportedly dug out on excavation. (Renovation took place as recently as in nineteen seventies)*

Moving further on, there are various other holy places in the area, which are worth mentioning. These include a temple dedicated to Lord Narayana, Dargah of Vousi Sahib, one of the pious Muslim Fauqueers and then in the close neighbourhood an ancestral house of one of the greatest saints of Kashmir, Peer Pandit Pathchha. Since, the man on mission is moving towards a narrow lane; where he would be face to face with apparently an ancient but unique structure of which the description shall follow subsequently. Rishipeer, as he was fondly known to local people, lived in an era, during when Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb was occupying the throne of India. This Saint had his birth in a family called Khashoos. The structure, where he grew, became a shrine equally held pious by Hindus as well as Muslims, who would pay their reverences to the saint on various occasions. Rishipeer, a great upasak / worshipper of Sharaika Devi (Chakrishori) had by virtue of his great tapa/ worship, attained sainthood at a very early stage. His daily parikramas round Hariparvat, included, Dandwath and Chandri-Kala, an essential part

of his penance. Such routine of spiritual practices continued with him all through his life, no matter whether it rained, snowed or would



Rishipeer Sahib/ Pt. Kesheva Khushoo

be a scorching heat of hot summer day. (The terms Chandrikala constitutes as many daily rounds/ parikramas around Hariparvat as the sequential number associated with the date/day of particular fortnight of Hindu calendar, viz., Krishnapaksha or Shokula Paksha. To be exact, it is an ascending order system of Parikramas, one to fifteen during Shukla Paksha, corresponding to increasing size of moon, with maximum number of parikramas on Poornimashi and likewise, decreasing number of the rounds fifteen to one in Krishen paksha in accordance with steadily diminishing size of Moon, viz; minimum number of rounds on Awamas). (Dandwath on the other hand, means repeatedly prostrating one's body on ground for every single step taken in the forward direction on the Parikrama path). Such a complicated path of yoga had definitely affected Rishipeer's health and thus weakened his physique to such an extent that he was almost crippled at an early age. Consequently, he had to use wooden hand chappels (Khadawan) for his physical movements through the rest of his life. But, his devotion and will-power neither failed him in maintaining his vigour nor let his infirmity prove hindrance of any kind. It never dampened his

spirits He, uninterruptedly, continued his daily routine which in turn helped him in seeking spiritual bliss. Eventually, he occupied the seat of one of the greatest saints of seventeenth century Kashmir. Rishipeer was a man of boundless powers. His mere presence would give healing touch to thousands of suffering masses.

People from all walks of life, irrespective of the religion, they belonged to, had greatest respect for him. Legend goes that once a devastating fire broke out in the city of Srinagar, which engulfed almost the entire eastern part of it. People were seen crying and wailing all around. The noise was so horrifying that it disturbed the very tranquility of Rishipeer Sahib. He could not resist himself from dragging his body to the spot. People say that he stood there thinking for a while and then threw one of his wooden hand chapples in to the fire. There was a sudden turn of events, the fire got extinguish all at-once, and the situation was brought under control instantaneously. These miracles, they say, continued to happen for quite some time. However, from that day he restricted himself to the use of only one wooden hand chappel for his movements. Rishipeer liked to have meaningful discourses that were easily understandable and could throw light/Prakasha on typical theosophical issues in a simple way. He guided not only those who deserved, but also piloted the common man, whose welfare and spiritual elevation was of utmost importance to him.

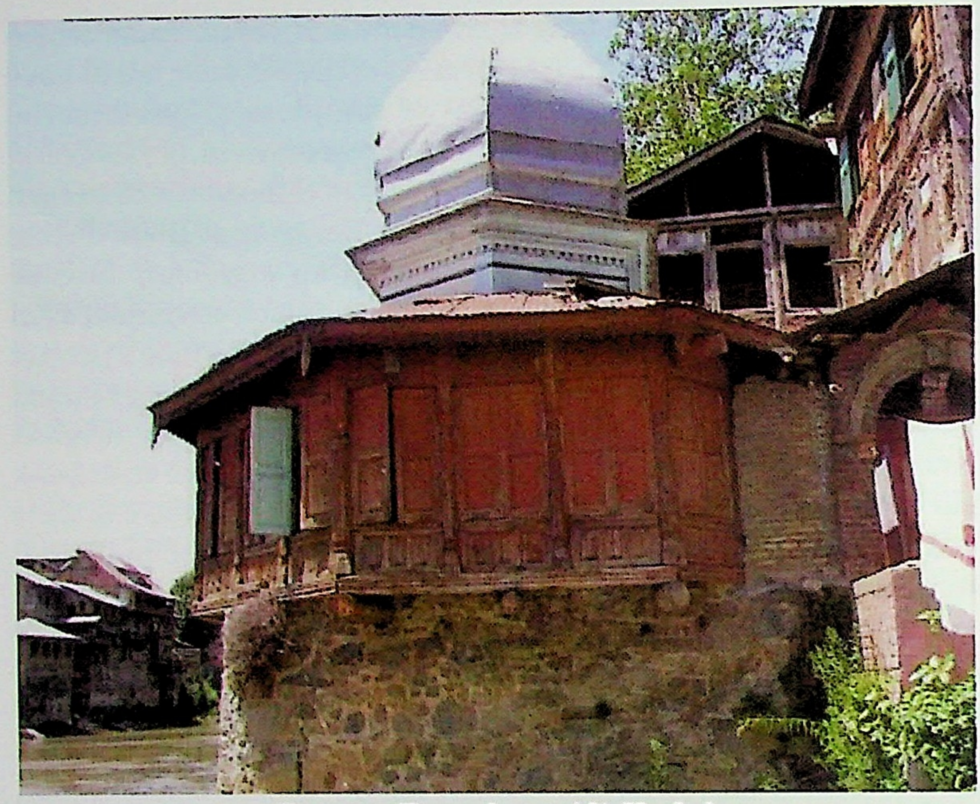
Rishipeer sahib was contemporary of another great saint, Mukhdoom Sahib, a pious Muslim/a sufi. (His Shrine lay at the southern tip of Hariparbat hill, just near Mata Jwala Ji's Shilla). Rishipeer and Mukhdoom Sahib, apart from being very intimate friends shared almost the same spiritual space. They had great regard and respect for each other's viewpoints. Kashmiri Pandits, prior to their migration in 1990, would start their morning parikrama (walking around Hariparvat), by paying homage to saint Mukhdoom at the gates of his shrine, irrespective of the fact that he represented a different faith for them in the present scenario. Rishipeer belonged to an orthodox Brahmin family, but, it in no way prevented him from interacting with the people of other sects or religions. So far as social and cultural aspects of his life were concerned, he enjoyed the company of masses everywhere, without any personal interest or attachment. He practiced superficial worldly ties in order to maintain the balance between spiritual and physical apsects of his mortal being.

He would take diet that suited or sustained his body,while avoided such feasts that disturbed the tranquility and purity of his mind. Once invited to a dinner by one of his friends, Rishipeer Sahib accepted the invitation with all humility, but meantime expressed his reservations. He requested his Host to ensure that the items of preparation to be served should in no case be tasted prior to the start of the dinner. The Host readily agreed the proposition and advised his cooks to follow instructions accordingly. However, when the chief guest arrived and the dinner was about to be served, the host was asked whether the requisite formalities had been followed in to-to. The reply came in affirmation. Rishipeer immediately took some water in his palm and sprinkled it over the plates. One live cock, standing on a single leg, is said to have appeared before the guests. The host felt ashamed. He sought an explanation from the head cook, who admitted before all the guests that he had actually tasted the prepared item.

When Saif Khan was the subedar of Kashmir, People started looking upon Rishipeer as their indisputable ruler, a King from the heavens. Both Hindus and Muslims would seek his blessings. His word was an order or a Farman. The devotees started offering him coins for maintaining the Ashram at Devi-Angan, established by him in association with other two devotees (viz; Sh.Naanshah and Sh. Atmaram) (Readers will find frequent mention of the place, Devi-Angan, in this text). Obviously, such a development may have irritated Subedar, more so, when Farmans issued, seemed to dictate the very authority vested in him by the Emperor Aurangzeb. He wrote a letter to the Emperor complaining that the man, who hardly had the strength to move his feet freely, did wield so much of influence on the masses that they were ready to sacrifice their lives for him. They would carry him to all the parts of the city in a palki, as if; he had been the actual ruler. Since, Subedar could not digest all this; he not only accused Rishipeer of displaying magical powers for inciting the poor against Governor, but also for issuing Farmans under the mark of his ring as a seal and thus, undermining the authority of the State. When the king received this message, he could hardly control his anger. Being an orthodox Muslim, he could never tolerate the unlawful activities of a non-believer; reportedly indulging in the use of magical powers. He immediately issued instructions for Subedar to have the man arrested. Rishipeer on the other hand, continued helping the poor without caring for the consequences. Since,

he hardly distinguished a king from an ordinary man. Some people also hold that the men in the employment of the Subedar might have felt offended because of the denial of the protocol/ preferential treatment that they expected as the representatives of Governor, which probably led them to poison the ears of Subedar, who in turn had Rishipeer arrested. They say that the Emperor at Delhi during that night had reportedly confronted with an extremely terrible experience that produced shiver in his bones, which continued even after he was fully awakened. The guards present in the king's private chambers had confirmed the unusual happenings. According to them an elderly person with dazzling face, allegedly possessing magical powers, was seen moving at his will in and out of the Royal chambers. He had even introduced himself to the people around, who felt their bodies chilled with fear and the Emperor instead of his usual commanding tone had asked his men in a shaky voice, how that stranger had managed the entry into his chambers. The stranger making dignified exit, was heard saying that the artificially raised barriers defended by mere mortals could hardly restrict his movements. Meanwhile, Subedar had also received a secret message that Rishipeer had continued to enjoy his freedom as before, would meet his devotees as usual, even though, he was actually in the custody of sepoys, a fact endorsed to by one and all. Subedar was so perplexed that he sought a report from the officials concerned. He had not to wait for a long for his doubts were cleared by a confirmation he received from the royal sources at Delhi, a note drawn in the form of an apology, assumingly tendered by the Emperor under compelling circumstances. It had led not only to the with-drawing of Royal orders against the saint but even conferring upon him the title of "Peer Pandith Padshah, Har- dua- Jahan Mushkus asaan"

Rishipeer Sahib's mother once felt a longing for taking a holy dip in the sacred waters of Harmukh Ganga. But she hardly expected such a thing to happen during her life time. It was something that she could only dream of, for she knew that she was in such a situation, where she entirely depended upon her son and that such a difficult pilgrimage could hardly have been undertaken by the two, in view her old age and the visible infirmity of his son. With a gloomy look on her face, she closed her eyes, took a long breath and started pondering in despair. Rishipeer immediately understood all that was transpiring in her mind. He tried to comfort her saying that she had no reason to lose faith in her son and assured her that he would

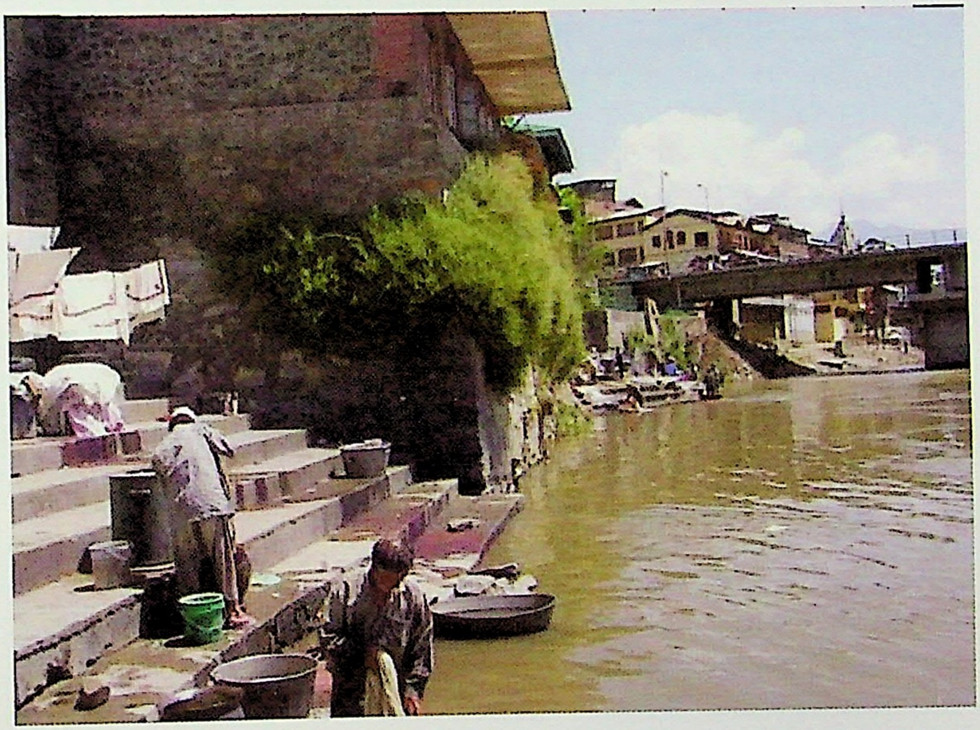


Batyar Temple at Ali-Kadal

certainly fulfil her cherished dream on Wednesday the next, the eighth day of the fortnight (Shuklapaksha) in Bhadroon. (It is a Hindu calendar month). She would have laughed at such a commitment by a person with infirmity, had the words not come straight from her son's mouth. Lest, it may hurt the feelings of her son, she wore a false smile on her face. It may appear strange, but people believe that Ganga ji did grace the occasion with her presence at Batyar Ghat on Ganga Ashtami. Rishipeer made a small earthen boat, took a stick in one hand and a grass chappels (pullahur) in the other, he requested his mother to follow him up to the Ghat. (Ghat is usually a place on river banks, where people assemble in early morning hours). While, Vitasta was flowing before them, he told his mother to close her eyes, made her to wear the chappels and asked her to touch the small earthen boat with her toe. No sooner did she touch the so called toy boat, she went into Trans and in a flash of a second, they say, Ganga Ji appeared at the Ghat and Rishipeer Shaib's mother as per her wish, had a holy dip in the sacred waters of Harmukh Ganga. A spring oozing milky waters is said to have come into existence, permanently, under the waters of Vitasta, at a spot, lying

adjacent to Vosee Sahib's shrine, exactly between the left corner of Batyar and Dobhi yarbal. From that day onwards, Pandits, besides celebrating the auspicious occasion of Ganga Ashthami at various shrines, began celebrating the day with a holy bath in the waters of Vitasta at this Ghat.

Strange but true that it once occurred to Rishipeer Sahib whether there could be any other devotee as dear to the Goddess Sharika as he thought himself to be. He had not to wait for a long. During that night he had a dream, wherein he saw both himself and his friend sucking milk from the two respective nipples of Mother's breast. Peer-Pandit realized that he had committed a sin, as he ought not to have bred such nonsense within his mind.



Batyar Ghat on Vitasta Near Vousi Sahib's Ziyarat

Devotees have a tradition of seeking his blessings by offering donations at his ancestral house in the denominations of one, eleven, one hundred one and so on. Their faith is so firm that as and when they come across complex situations in life, Rishipeer is there to fulfil their wishes and resolve their problems. A mere visit to this shrine is enough to provide great solace.

Rishipeer is said to have received guidance from various Gurus, including saints like Krishen Joo Kar, Roopa Bhawani and later-on even from some disguised saint probably nick named Zannan Zoye (The actual name of this Guru could not be ascertained. The details relating to Krishen joo Kar and Jeewan Shah Sahib were not forthcoming at the time of writing this account. Failure to include such details in this text is regretted. However, description on the life of Roopa Bhawani shall follow separately). As regards Rishipeer Sahib's disguised guru, he was a helper in one aristocratic Pandit family at Rainawari. It can be said with a great degree of firmness that his personality was hidden even the inmates of the house, where he had spent considerable part of his life. The women folk in the family took him for a simpleton and did not hesitate even to have their hair combed by him. Their treatment towards the man was not so apt. But he had no complaints either. However, one night, an elderly lady in the house by chance woke up in the middle of the night. She observed some light coming out of the servant's room. She got suspicious and started peeping through a hole in the door. To her amazement, she saw the man deep in meditation, his face dazzling as bright as Sun, the impact of which, she hardly could resist. She went upstairs. She would not have revealed the secret to anyone else, had her approach towards the man not changed all of a sudden. She started looking at him as an incarnation of God, the owner and not as an ordinary family servant. For her, he was not what he had been a few hours earlier. Finding that the secret was just to get disclosed, the man decided to leave the house for his final journey. But before he could give practical shape to his plan, he had to fulfill certain obligations. He, therefore, sought permission of the Head of the family; he had been serving so far, to visit his acquaintances at Ali-Kadal/ down town area of the city. The purpose was that before his final departure for heavenly abode, he could meet his disciple, Rishipeer, at his residence for discharging the duty of a guide/ a guru. (The reference here is to guidance, called as a Gorh Shabadha). However, the physical meeting between the Guru and the disciple was not destined to happen. Despite arriving at Rishipeer's house with a definite intention, he had to leave well before Rishipeer could return from his morning parikrama. Probably, Guru had his reasons for doing so. During his brief stay in disciple's house, he wanted to have puffs of Tobacco from smoking hukha.

Rishipeer's mother immediately fetched a hukha with freshly filled water, made a chilm for the man. (The chilm is a small pot with false bottom containing tobacco which is lighted by placing a timber on it.). Guru sucked the pipe for a moment and then left a word of advice with the elderly lady. She was told to let her son have one or two puffs from it on his arrival. Thereafter, the man stood up. He did not wait there even for a second. Perhaps, he was in hurry to leave for his destination. Hardly had the Guru moved out of the lane that Rishipeer made his appearance. His mother seemed so eager to disclose the news about the surprise visit of some sage and the instructions he had left for him to follow. Rishipeer felt very sad. He took the Hukha in his hand, had a long puff and was seen leaving his home in haste. His mother tried to enquire of him where he was proceeding to. But, he could hardly utter anything audible. Perhaps, he wanted to find out the whereabouts of the man, the Guru, who had called on him unceremoniously. He did face difficulty in tracing the address, but, his efforts finally paved the way and he located the house, his Guru had been staying in. It immensely shocked him to know that Guru had already left for his heavenly abode.

(While consolidating the material collected on the life of Rishipeer Sahib, details, such as, his initial name & family back ground etc, came to the light from one of the write ups, published by Satisar foundation, a social organization with a difference. In order to make the description complete and authentic, it was thought worth while to include these details below, with due acknowledgements to the concerned).

As per the published write up, there lived a well to do Kashmiri Pandit by the name of Sh. Govind Joo Khushoo, who did not marry till he attained the age of forty. An old woman, after great persuasion, managed to arrange his marriage to a girl named Sidh Laxmi from a village Gushi in Handwara. Sidh Laxmi's mother was a poor widow, who had consented to the proposal regarding the marriage of her daughter with Govind. The wedded couple did not conceive child for quite some time and when the hope of begetting the child seemed to dwindle, Sidhlaxmi in her prayers to Badrakali begged for a boon. Mother Goddess granted her the wish she had been feeding within so long. Accordingly, the day for her celebrations drew nearer and on the 6th day of Krishna paksha / fortnight probably Chatrehmas in the year 1637 A.D, while on her way to her in-laws, she suffered a

labour pain near the banks of Vitasta Nadhi at a place called Sopore and in the process delivered a son in a boat that she was sailing in. It is said that immediately thereafter a Jogi came out of his Samadhi to catch the glimpse of the child, whom he described as the second sun. While the child was lying in the lap of his mother, Jogi kissed the child's forehead and gave him the name, Naag puthur. Later on he assumed the name Kesheva from his parents. It is said that Pt. Krishen Joo Kar was his first Guru, who initiated him on the spiritual path. This Guru Shesha relation had the blessings of Goddess Sharika, whose upasak/ devotee, Rishipeer had been since his childhood days. In-fact, it was the beckoning call of Mother Goddess that had compelled him to slip away from Gushi village, where he lived after the death of his father. Though, Rishipeer was married to a beautiful girl at a very young age, yet it made no difference in his quest for knowing the ultimate truth. He was indifferent to worldly pleasures. Besides, his worship during earlier years, he also spent fourteen and a half years in tapa which included chandrikalas around Hariparvat, for which he earned for himself the name of Rishi from Hindus and peer from Muslims. Rishipeer was blessed with a son, named Rihananda, who had an excellent educational background. He excelled both in formal education as well as in the religious scriptures. He had married a girl from a poor family, who bore him two sons Kashi Pandit and Lal Pandit. Rihanand became a sadhu and expired after some time, while his elder son Kashi Nath followed the footsteps of his father. He became sanyasi at a very young age. The younger brother was a householder and he had had his descendants to date, called peers.

Long after 1990 migration, Krishna chanced to visit Rishipeer Sahib's birth place. Neighbouring People told him that the descendants of Peer sahib had since shifted to Jammu along with the pious Khadawoon but the devotees still continue to visit this Asthapan with the same devotion and faith. They recognize this saint as the beloved of two worlds with power to heal the sufferings of his devotees. The shrine is a unique square structure, standing on solid base of smoothly carved rectangular stone blocks (slabs of large dimensions). The upper portion of the structure comprises of Maharaje (small sized) bricks set in lime and sand paste with wood pieces adjusted here and there, the windows have special wooden pinjras fitted in wooden frames of rectangular shape with semi-

circular top and straight base, hardly to be seen elsewhere in the city these days. The inner ceiling of its roof is surely an example of finest wood work, last but not the least, a doom / a spire elevated in the middle of the roof, with iron sheet covering, gives it a distinct look of a temple like structure. Because of wonderful brick work, the shrine should have attracted its inclusion as protected structure. Lately, some devotees had undertaken the repair work, including a thin coat of cement cover over the bricks. The shrine has lost its former typical shape because of it. Though, such repairs had become unavoidable and therefore, the people who did this work voluntarily need both encouragement and appreciation. Yet, it would have been far more desirable, had the repair work of this typical structure been taken up by Government under the supervision of an expert Archaeologist and thus avoided the short cuts for proper maintenance. (Had it been left unattended, the structure would have collapsed. Thus, the devotees could hardly wait for the assistance for renovation work to start, especially, under prevailing conditions, with no state backing. Probably, the only alternative left for them was to initiate the work at their own expense).



Rishipeer Sahib's Asthapana

Two to three hundred yards retreat on the main street, the visitor comes across a place linked with a pious soul, named Vousi sahib, whose Zeyarat is just next to Batyar temple. (People believe that Batyar temple was rebuilt over Rishipeer sahib's Samadhi). Krishna's mother had a great reverence for Vousi Sahib's Zeyarat. Every time she went to her parental house; she would make it a point to pay respects to this great faqueer at the entrance of his Dargah. Sometimes, she would also take short cuts to Aali Kadal through the Zeyaratgah compound, where from she would again bow in reverence. Krishna had virtually no source of information on the life of Vousi Sahib, except that the great peer was guillotined by thugs at a place called Shelwat in Shadhipora. It is said that he walked to his abode headless with bleeding skull in his hands. A snap-shot of the shrine was taken by Krishna on his visit to the Ziyarat-gah, for which he is grateful to the Mullah Sahib. He tried his best to approach nearby people, but failed to gather courage in asking for any verbal or written material on the subject for inclusion of details in the text.



Vouse Sahib's Asthan

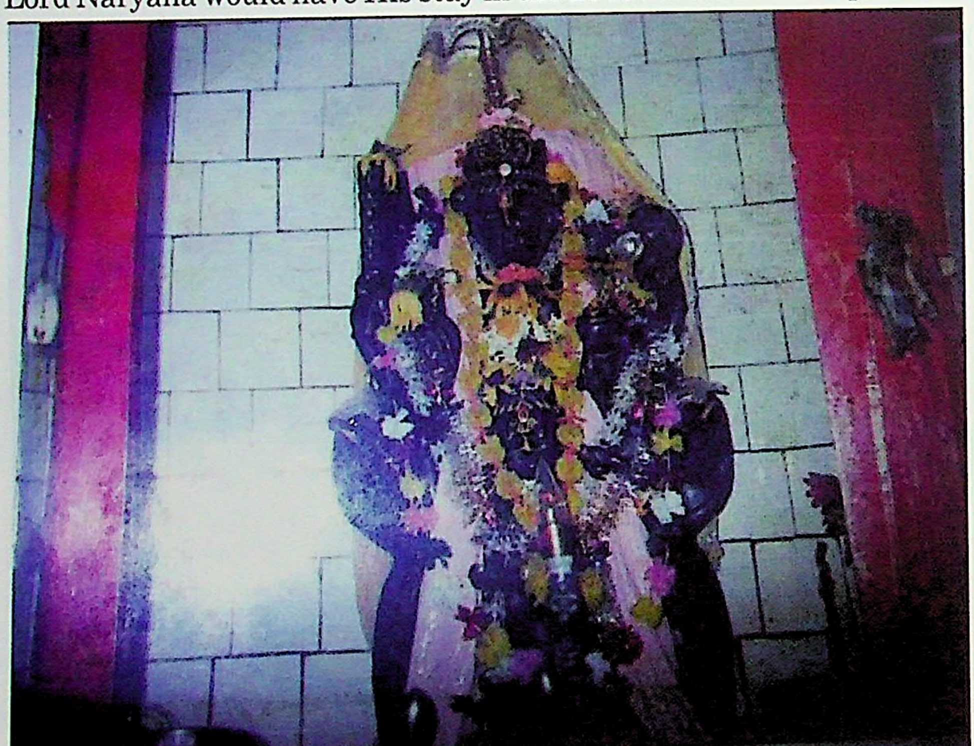
From here Krishna followed a lane leading to a temple dedicated to Lord Narayana. It was a place with which his very soul was deeply associated, where the Lord, he worshipped, had chosen for Himself a display of delightful manifestation, in the form of a rare and matchless beauty, carved out of a piece of black marble or metal, with gaze beyond comprehension. Krishna would always feel calm and composed before the superbly visible-self of his Lord. In-fact, all

his troubles ceased to exist the moment he was within the temple premises. He had a firm belief that he could ask for anything from the Lord, without having slightest fear of getting snubbed. Yet he never had the mind to take such a liberty, at least, for himself. Faith in Him had given him enough of strength. He had lived the most difficult moments of his life, the period of desolation, in the company of his Lord, which had greatly helped him in letting the turbulence go past his side without leaving a trace behind. But somehow, it once struck his mind to put his faith in the Lord to test. A desire to have a glimpse of one of his friends, who for egoistic differences had distanced himself away from him, with a craving in mind for a patch up, he was led to seek Lord's blessing. The very next morning, while he was on his parikrama, (A walk around Hari-Parbat), his first stop, as usual, would be the Lord's abode. As he was about to enter the temple lane, he saw his friend coming out of it all of a sudden. Later on, he repented for having tested the benevolence of his lord for such a petty thing.

Krishna's mother had spent most of her childhood days in a house in the neigh-bourhood of the Temple. She used to narrate to her son the wonderful incidents relating to the Lord that she had either witnessed herself or heard from her elders. She was always eager to pass on to the future progeny all the events associated with Lord's arrival and the circumstances that later-on led to the construction of the temple, (Viz; the Lord's abode).

People in the vicinity of Bulbul Lanker say that there lived a family, called Zunhh by Surname. It all started, when one of the elders in the family had a dream one night, wherein he had darshans/ appearance of Lord Naryana, Who directed him to arrive along with Khaoch (a big Naav or a boat) at a particular spot on the waters of Anchar Lake, somewhere near Tullmula. At first, the man did not believe in what he had seen in his dreams. But, when he had such dreams repeatedly, he consulted number of elders in the locality, who advised him that they together should take the chance of verifying the truth behind such hallucinations. In order to ascertain the facts, the party of elderly persons, one fine morning set out in a boat for the perceived spot. After rowing for some time on vast expanse of water, their boat came to an abrupt halt at a spot that the man had actually seen in dreams. The rows were taken out of the water. A cane-wood-basket tied to the ends of the ropes (seat like structure)

was immersed into the water. Suddenly, the strings, holding the basket, got stretched, as if, towed by some invisible force from beneath. Pulling the basket out of the water was followed by appearance of an exceedingly beautiful black statue amidst formation of ripples on the surface of the lake. The sudden appearance of such a phenomenal beauty out of the gushing waters was so bewildering that it took them some time before they could regain their mental balance and be into their normal self. The Lord had unexpectedly assumed a posture in the basket making it easy for men to coil the ropes for the Lord to be seated on board without the slightest feel of imbalance to the inmates. Thereupon, the party started paddling the rows for their return journey. On their arrival, they decided that Lord Naryana would have His stay in the house of a Brahmin purohit.



Lord Narayana's Pratima/ Idol at Bulbul-Lanker



Lord Narayana's Temple at Bulbul-Lanker

People from different parts of the city thronged in for Lord's Darshana and the poor Brahmin's home became the place of worship. The family, henceforth, came to be known as Baghwans. Some people hold that in due course of time the devotees in the locality felt the need for constructing the temple as it was not always possible to have the glimpse of the lord without causing inconvenience to the family. The matter was deliberated upon and also discussed in a Devotee's meet. The decision for construction of temple was taken unanimously in an assembly. Some say that later generation of the family of purohits by chance confronted a German visitor, who, while passing through their lane, had felt thirsty and probably knocked their door. One of the inmates came out of the house and showed the visitor in. Once entering the house, his attention was suddenly attracted towards the gracious presence of the Lord. Since, foreigners were welcomed those days; the family led him into their house. The moment he was inside the Lord's chamber, he felt his breath stopped. He could not lift his eyes from glittering face of the Lord. It is said that he immediately put forth a proposal before the head of the family that he was ready to pay any amount for the possession of the Lord.

While the deal was in progress, fire broke out all of a sudden. The flames started leaping out of the room in quite wilderness. Had someone from the family not asked for the help of the neighbours, the entire locality would have been reduced to ashes. Obviously, this incident was enough to have the deal buried under the carpet. No further negotiations on the subject could take place thereafter. Probably, the devotees living around did approach the department of Archaeology, who reportedly not only had such negotiations banned, but even prohibited people from taking photographs of the Lord henceforth. The story involving the deal with the foreigner might have been fabricated/ planted possibly to seek the cooperation of people to raise the funds for construction of a temple. On Vishakha Shuklapaksh Dashmi in late nineteen forties or early nineteen fifties, local /Mohalla committee set the gates of the constructed temple open in record time. Lord's arrival graced the temple premises amidst the chanting of Vedic mantras. Henceforth, His darshans were available throughout the day without any restriction.

The temples in the valley, wherever these exist, besides having religious significance also have certain pages of history to reveal. It is not only the matter of faith that draws one to these gates, but also an evolution of a better sense of judgment and understanding that ultimately attract one towards the time tested thoughts and traditions attached with such sites. Other-wise, as they say, one can seek Him in the Nirakar-roopa, (the formless form, all pervading, apparently shapeless or invisible yet at times in Aakara/ the visible form). It all depends upon how much receptive or elevated the mind of the seeker is.

Krishna narrates one of the incidents that took place during his desolate days. He was full of despair and therefore wanted a change. He started attending the evening prayer in the temple his Lord stayed. Incidentally, one particular evening, it so happened that an elderly lady, who had come to enquire of Guru ji/ the temple priest, whether he could spare some time to perform Satinarayan puja at her home. She had also brought with her a basket full of Puris (Sweet-flour chapaties fried in ghee). Perhaps, she knew that the priest may not get the chance to leave the temple at that particular period of time and in that event, she could have the option of performing the requisite puja within the temple premises itself. Feeling the pulse of the moment, the women ultimately decided to sit before the Lord.

She opened the chain of her bag and took out of it an exceedingly beautiful garland made of silk cocoons, as white as snow, which she offered to the Lord. She tied it round His neck with great care. As usual, the shiny background of Lord's statue presented a specimen of flawless beauty, something beyond perception. While the white garland of cocoons gave an exceptionally beautiful effect to already existing items of decoration, like the saffron tilak marks on the white clay paste applied on forehead and elsewhere, decked with multi-coloured flower petals, colourful garlands both natural and artificial, the silver crown / silver chhether and last but not the least the variety of saris of suitable shades covering different body parts of the Lord, yet, all this was not enough to satisfy Krishna's artistic temper. He felt that there was further scope of bringing in perfection to this setting. Probably looking out for some unique item to supplement and serve as contrast to the garland of white cocoons', he hurriedly left the temple for purchasing the desired item. Just then, it started raining. He continued to march up and down the newly established market on Mar- road. He tried hard for seeking the gift for his Lord, but all in vain. Ultimately, with a swollen face, he retreated towards his home, utterly frustrated, abusing and cursing himself for the failure. Narrating the episode to his family members, his younger brother stood up, in a bid to provide some comfort, he immediately ran out of his home with a twenty rupee note and was back within seconds with the garland exactly that Krishna had thought of. Had it not been very late in the evening, Krishna would have liked to see his Lord with this garland on that very moment. Next evening when the temple doors opened for evening prayers, Krishna lost no time in decorating his Lord. But no sooner did he garland the lord, it caught fire from a distant lamp and in no time, flames seemed to engulf the entire place. How the priest with a long stick in his hand appeared on the scene, is a mystery. It was followed by another miracle, that of the burning garland coming out of the neck of the Lord as if flying just to be caught by Krishna's hands, who ran with it through the middle of the hall in to the open space. By the time he was in the compound, the garland had reduced to a mere loop of thin iron wire. The way flames had leapt up, certainly predicted that the damage was immense. But surprisingly, nothing of that sort had happened and the devotees present in the temple, instead of scolding, consoled the boy. For his satisfaction, they advised him to purchase a new sari for the Lord. With a heavy heart, Krishna left for his home. He

could hardly sleep that night even when mother tried to comfort him by narrating various instances of Lord's grace. Sure enough the morning came with the good news in the form of two offers for permanent Government jobs.

The details would be incomplete without narrating the unfortunate incident that took place in the year 1990. While the valley was in turmoil, a section of the population, mainly Hindus, were being forced to leave their home and hearth. There was hardly any devotee left to offer prayers in the temple. Certain acquaintances told Krishna that one day some outlaws/ militants entered the temple premises. There were only two occupants inside the temple: the priest and the sadhu. The outlaws tied the elderly priest with a rope, while the Sadhu was probably fired at and reportedly killed on the spot. Lord's statue, carved out of black stone or metal, depicted Lord riding on Garudha with his feet on lotus flower and in turn lotus embedded in a concrete base of an almirah, with a glass case mounted on the bracket. The insane elements used cutter to detach the Lord's statue from lotus base. Later-on, they shifted Lord to an unknown place, where He must have remained with them (the militants) for some days, till security forces got the wind from somewhere and subsequently followed the outlaws, forcing them to take refuge in a Doonga/ a big boat. (Donga-Kishtis/ big boats are usually seen anchored on the banks of river Vitasta).The security forces pursued them and during an encounter the boat is said to have capsized. Thereafter, nothing is known for certain. However, the Muslims living in the neighbour-hood deserve a pat/ praise, for they encouraged the few devotees who had opted to stay back during migration to initiate the work of repairing and renovating the temple structure, despite prevailing chaos and death threats from hardcore militant organizations. The news regarding the renovation of the temple by Muslims became an important masala item for a news telecast on Aaj Tak channel. It is true that this temple wears a deserted look these days. There are only a few to offer prayers, yet the Lord's invisible form is still there. His image is so imprinted on the minds of worshippers that even such heinous acts committed by militants can hardly dampen their spirit.

Krishna, after his brief visit to the eastern part of the neighbour-hood, is back to Nawa Kadal chowk, from where he has plans to explore the western part. The path, he follows, splits at some distance

in to two bye-lanes, one meeting the Ring road through Doombkadal and the other going straight through Dhar Mohalla, the birth place of Roopa-Bhawani /Alakh-Sahibi, a mystic poetess, who like Lalded was an embodiment of sacrifice and devotion. She has left an indelible mark on social, religious and cultural legacy of Kashmir. A brief description, on some aspects of the life of one of the greatest saints of the valley, becomes inevitable here.

Roopa-Bhawani (RoupheDed) was born in one of the respectable pandit families in Kashmir. Her father, Madhav Joo Dhar, a saintly Person, was married to an equally virtuous woman from another well-to-do Kashmiri pandit family. The couple did not conceive for a long time after the birth of their first two sons. Madhev Joo Dhar had a Guru in some pious woman, who lived across the river vitasta just opposite to his residence. Moreover, Dhar Sahib and his wife were ardent worshippers of Goddess Sharika / Chakrishore Devi. Once, it so happened that his wife had a dream, wherein she saw a lightning thunder striking her belly. It was simultaneously followed by sighting a beautiful girl child stepping out of her womb with a dazzling light on her face. It was such an unforgettable experience for the woman of her nature to take the incident so lightly. She got out of her bed and without a pause, narrated the dream sequence to her husband, who recalled somewhat co-related incident he had come across a day before. It so happened that after the morning puja of Mata Sharika Devi was over at Chakrishour and as Madhev Joo was about to start his return journey. Suddenly something unusual occured. A small girl of divine beauty, wearing a playful smile on her face, appeared before him. He wanted to interact with the child, but she made a slip and disappeared in ether, as if, with a word of promise to return. He thought for a while, it struck him that the child was none other than Goddess Chakreshori Herself. Dhar Sahib wanted to narrate the incident to his wife, but somehow it slipped out of his mind. When his wife narrated her incident, he could not take it so casual. While deliberating on connecting topics, the couple decided to seek guidance from their Guru. On meeting her, they narrated the respective incidents to her in detail, she listened patiently, paused for a while and then broke her silence, only to tell them that Sharika Devi Herself was likely to take birth in Dhar (Sahib's) family. Sure enough, the prediction turned out to be true, as Madhev joo's wife conceived a child. In due course of time, she delivered a beautiful female child. The child was brought up strictly in a religious

environment. She grew up into beautiful lass with rare virtues. As per the traditions prevailing then, Roopa Bhawani was married at somewhat tender age in a respectable family of Saproos. Her husband, named Heeranand Saproo, was a resident of Saphiryar in Habba-Kadal. The couple did not have a smooth sailing. Their marital life was all full of ups and downs. Since, Social customs then were more rigid and complicated than in-vogue these days. Obviously, like other girls of her time, she had to face problems on this count. But she never made any complaint of it. Her mother-in-law, Sompkuji, once went to the extent of leveling allegations against her, saying that she had the habit of leaving her house in the early hours of morning unmindful of others. This prompted Roopa Bhawani to insist her husband to accompany her, but he seldom liked to sacrifice his comforts, that too just for the sake of his wife. However, one particular morning, the man in him woke up; he followed her without letting her know his intentions. While reaching near Chakreshwar Asthapana (Chakreshwar temple at Hariparvat), Roopa Bhawani, who by then had come to know that her husband was pursuing her, turned to offer him the necessary assistance for she knew that coming hurdles may discourage and distract Saproo Sahib and may force him to retreat from midway. Unfortunately, she could not convince him and as such his sheer ignorance deceived him. As husband, his ego could hardly allow him to be led by his wife. He mistook road for a big water body, on which he could hardly dare to tread any further. Thus, he deprived himself of Devi's-darshan, despite wife standing there with both hands stretched, desperately hoping that her husband would respond to her call and agree to cross the illusionary barrier in her company. Unfortunate part of it was that the husband failed to repose his faith in the divine nature of his wife and instead chose to return his home unceremoniously. Thereafter, Roopa Bhawani left for a solitary place named Cheshima sahibi for meditation. This place is in the close vicinity of Cheshma-Shahi, the royal spring that oozes the sweetest and the purest water. She stayed there for 12 long years along with her brother before leaving for Manigam in north Kashmir, where she meditated for some more years.

Note: - ((Cheshima Sahibi on the foot hills of Zeyasht Rudhra is on the route leading to Pari-Mahal, a place to the east of Srinagar city, in the close proximity of Zeethyahr, the abode of Zeyashta Bhagwati). (Pari-Mahal, a mini-palace constructed on an elevated piece of land by Dara Shikwa, where he

studied Hindu scriptures under the guidance of top scholars of that time in a secluded atmosphere). Shankracharya temple though standing on a separate hillock is at a stone's throw from here and can be ascended from alternative Gupkar side route. (Shankracharya temple is an ancient temple structure, a rare specimen of architectural beauty, rebuilt third time, by Adi-Guru Shankaracharya on Zeyashteshwara Hill top more than eleven hundred years ago. The Temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva/ Zeyashteshwara. From here one can have the full view of entire Dal Lake. Historically, this temple site existed prior to the arrival of Adi Guru Ji, but at the time of his establishing the Matt, the temple was in a dilapidated condition and as such Shankra was prompted to undertake necessary repairs. He rather constructed the temple afresh, thus, giving it the present look .There can be no denying of the fact that Shankra helped in creating this exceptionally admirable piece of architecture, the rarest temple structure depicting yenta in the structural form.) (There is also Maha-Deva's Shiella, on the peak of Mount Mahadeva, the foot hills of which houses the famous Dachigam Rakh/ sanctuary, which can be seen from Maha-Deva's sheilla in full view. Hariparvat, the abode of Haari Devi, with its reflection across the waters of Dal Lake fills in the gap, blessing the seekers with all they need. Famous Mughal gardens on the shores of the lake, slightly in the shades, forms part of this environ)). Obviously, Roopa Bhawani had purposely chosen such a lonely and peaceful place, as Cheshima Sahibi spring. The place had dense forests and as such, the habitat of wild animals. Roopa-Bhawani and her brother spent more than a decade here. A victim of social exploitation, she needed a cool and calm atmosphere and here she had the perfect setting. Lord Maha-Deva, Shankracharya, Sareshour, Goddess Zashsta and Sharika Bhagwati, were all there to provide her the necessary feed and keep her away from complications of social bindings. As time passed, she moved to some other places as well, including a long stay at Manigam, wherefrom, she shifted to Vaskur. People from all walks of life became Mata's disciples. The devotees from Srinagar later on insisted her to return to her parental house at Safa-Kadal.

Roopa Bhawani performed miracles at times to enlighten those, who would always be ready at disturbing the peace and tranquility of her mind. A better explanation of this fact lies in the following account. Once during a social function, Dhâr Sahib's family sent a big degchi of Khir as Prasad to Saproo family (Prasad usually refers to sweets or food items served in the name of God; Khir is, a mixture of rice, sugar and milk prepared in a big vessel called degchi). The response of the family was not so good. First critical reaction came

from Roopa Bhawani's mother-in-law, Sampkuj, who started stretching her nose and played with her eyebrows to make guests know that the quantity of khir received was inadequate and would probably fall short off the overall requirement. Roopa Bhawani judged the mood of her mother-in-law. She requested her not to worry on this account. In-fact, she insisted her to distribute as much of khir as she needed to satisfy her kith and kin. To the utter surprise of her mother–in-law, the khir in the vessel continued to maintain a steady level even after every one was served the Prasada. The old lady in the heart of her hearts could not but feel ashamed at her behavior, but tactfully avoided the sense of guilt overcoming her. Roopa Ded let the vessel float on the water of river Vitasta in a normal course, whispering, as if, to direct the vessel to reach the place of its initial destination (viz her parental Ghat).

Mata Roopa Bhawani in the earlier stages of her life would have been upset at such happenings, but with passage of time, she had learnt to be patient. She knew how to divert her attention from shallow thoughts to something meaningful. As and when, she felt upset, she would start composing vaks. An approach that helped her to understand things better and express her observations in a most refined manner. In-fact, she had a fine knack of entertaining her adversaries with the sweet, soft and words with poetic flow, which often carried the effects of nectar to some and served poison for others. Even to this day, people read her poetic compositions, (Vak is a verse full of great devotion). She has very beautifully depicted her life experiences, her intense search for the absolute truth and the understanding of the knots of mysticism that were slowly getting unfolded to her. Having attained mastery over all religious scriptures at a very early stage, scholars and learnt Brahmins had regard for her scholarship and would rarely question her view points on most complicated theosophical topics. In her later years she confined herself to meditation at her birth place. And it is said that she blessed the native people with a well of nectar the water of which people say, has terrific healing power and this well is still in existence at her Janamboomi Asthapana, with a mulberry tree to cover its mouth. Dhars, in-fact, all Kashmiri Pandits celebrate Mata's annual Shradha ceremony on two particular occasions, Kashmiri call it Sahibanhanz Satam, one in the pitrapakhsha and other on her Nirvana / anniversary day falling in the Krishna Paksha of the month of Magha on Saptmi day (She is said to have attained her Nirvana on this day

of the first fortnight, the month of December in 1721). It is often said that she had great praise for and even blessed Dhar daughter-in-laws for their devotion to duty, at the same time she was somewhat critical of the behaviour of Dhar parivaars and in particular of their daughters, more so, when it related to their upbringing in an aristocratic atmosphere. Various books and research papers have already been published on different aspects of the eventful life of this great Spiritual soul. Therefore, the brief account given here may not offer anything new or qualitatively better.

Now, it would be a great injustice with the past, if some of the interesting facts about the area are not included in the description. Krishna, still roaming on the lanes and by-lanes of Dhar Mohalla, it seemed to him that place had retain its importance even after so called autocratic rule in the state had ceased to exist. (Krishna recalls that his elders would usually say that for some period, after independence, the Governor and the Chief Minister of the state of J&K, were designated as P.M and Saddar-I-Riyasat respectively. However, during the tenure of Late G.M Sadiq, these seats of power were re-designated as "The Chief Minister' and "The Governor" respectively, an anomaly that was removed as a step to bring uniformity in laws and also silence those who expressed doubt on finality of integration) This particular place did produce men like, Late Bakshi Ghulam Mohd, the Ex-Prime-Minister of the state of J&K and Late Mr. D.P.Dhar, one time Indian Ambassador to Russia, later-on, Dy.chairman Planning Commission and probably the union Minister in Mrs. Indira Gandhi's cabinet, a contemporary of both Sheikh Mohd Abdullah and Bakshi Ghulam Mohd, he and also various other leading-politicians played pivotal role in shaping the Kashmir politics years before and after the independence. A due space has been given for a detailed description of the events before and after 1931, of which Skeikh shahib has been the central character. He belonged to Soura, an area in the northern out skirts of Srinagar city. Thus, Safa-Kadal, besides being the birth place of Roopa-Ded has been a political hub till recently.

Before the topic gets shifted to some where-else, the brief account on one of the most beautiful temples of Srinagar city, situated on right bank of Vitasta Nadi between Nawa-Kadal and Safa-Kadal, built by an aristocratic family, (Dhar Parivaar), can hardly be missed. The temple, dedicated to Sita-Rama and Radha- Krishna, has a

distinct look and a wonderful scenic background. (It has a dominating site and structure, which gives it the uniqueness in context to its immediate surroundings). The structure is a reminder of the faith that once prevailed here and the conviction, the ardent devotees from this prosperous area of Srinagar city, once held. The temple had a beautiful park with fountains, flower beds and baladaris for discourses on the theological subjects by scholars of repute. Like Gadhadhar Ji Temple at Amira Kadal, this temple would also attract large number of tourists, especially, those who sailed in a shikara/ a small boat, while going down the river to Chattabal/veer, for enjoying the spectacular view of the interior of the old city. The temple structure though left uncared for and almost in a dilapidated condition, does still give a compelling call to the tourists for a memorable visit to the place. A lane from here, if followed without deviation, would lead one to Noor bagh, abode of BharavRaza/, Shamshaanbhoomi, where Hindus from downtown area would perform the funeral rites of their dead. (*Marghat/ Shamshaan Bhoomi: a place, where dead bodies are consigned to flames).* Thanks to selfish and biased people, who for petty personal interests, allowed the land at the prime location to be grabbed under the garb of "land to tillers" resulting in the illegal occupation of the entire piece of land, extending from interior of Noorbagh, right up to Shawlteng across Vitasta. The beautiful area represented the green patch of cultivable land, abundant in shady chinar, tall popular and full grown conifer trees, which bordered the right bank of Vitasta as well as the fields around it. In this particular case, Government machinery was partly responsible for encouraging the unauthorized transference of the ownership rights, thereby depriving the section of the populace from even owning the cremation ground. Krishna opts a turn and takes a route via Sakidaffer towards Eid-gah, through a lane that has an entrance to one of the biggest grounds in the city. A very big mosque, named Aail Masheed, is situated at the extreme end of this ground, just by the road side. The entire place around the mosque would look completely isolated in earlier days. Only a few passersby would be seen moving down the road, except of-course, in early morning hours or during afternoons, when children from surrounding areas gathered for playing different types of games in what can be termed as one of the best play grounds in the city. But, as soon as evening time approached, jackals started howling and there would hardly be anyone, ready to move down this road. Tales on the

existence of Ghost floated now and then, which would add to the fear factor of all pervading loneliness in this area. A tell-told story connected with this mosque has been recorded here just for the entertainment of the readers.

One evening three friends got engaged in a hot discussion on whether Ghosts did actually exist or was it simply a myth. The discussion took a dramatic turn as one of the friends seemingly influenced by scientific approach, argued that it was a fear psychosis and nothing else. The other participants teasingly pumped the man to such a state of excitement that he showed his readiness to prove his conviction at any cost. He accepted the challenge of visiting Aail-Masjid during that very night. As to the testimony of his visit to the Masjid/ mosque during the night, it was decided that a piece of pointed wood would be fixed somewhere in the middle of the floor. True to his word, the man did visit the Mosque in the dead of the night. But as fate would have it, while he was nearing completion of the feat, unknowingly, the border of his pharan came under the pointed edge of the stick that he had struck into the ground. From his side, he had finished the task assigned to him and was about to stand and leave but, the moment he tired to raise his body from the ground; there was a sudden reverse pull, which hindered his movements. Thus, sensing unexpected danger, he lost his wits and in a fraction of a second fell on to the ground and was dead. Thus, the adventure of this man of scientific temperament ended on a sad note. These days the heavy rush of vehicular traffic on the road, particularly, during day time makes it a risky preposition for any pedestrian to walk on foot. Adding to the existing crisis, a network of new roads have come up, which either run parallel or cross each other with non-stop flow of day-night traffic. The Eid-gah to-Soura road has been widened, while as the road connecting the Mosque with Hawal/Zadibal, has also come up after devouring the portion of the water body called Khushal Sar, once famous for lotus stems. Greed hardly allows people to envision the dangers; they pose to their future progeny, particularly when they convert lakes into agriculture land. (It fills one with great remorse that once a water bodies called Khushal Sar and poker sar are in the process of being converted partly into a ground for a proposed school and partly for growing tree grooves. There is hardly any moisture left to remind that till recently these spots had been lakes). A piece of land, along the newly constructed road at the far end of Khushal sar, had a spring with a fully grown mulberry tree

within its centre. Hindus regarded it, a place of great religious significance. An asthapana/ a shrine dedicated to Shresht Bharva, Puranraza, the local Deity of the People living around the area between ZainaKadal and Chattabal. This abode of Bharva (viz; Muoolh sathana of PuranRaz) had its location just in front of Sharka Devi's Shilla /Haari Brarie, at a distance of merely a Kilometre or so. There were eight such abodes of Bharvas surrounding the Hariparvat hill, in the directions of North South, East, West, Noth-East, North-west, South-East and South-West.,(Apart from these abodes of Bharvas, there are many Bharav shrines spread all over the valley.) Puran Raz Bharva shrine was most frequently visited shrines by the local people. During the days of Krishna's despair, it once happened that a woman, a permanent member of prabhatpharie, probably mistook moonlit night for early morning hours and accordingly set out from her home for the usual parikrama. At the entrance of Bachi Darwaza, some elderly person joined her as a devotee, as if participating in the morning parbatpharie. While the two were on their way to Ganesh temple, the man found the opportunity of introducing himself to the old lady. During the discourse, he told her that he belonged to the area forming the neighbourhood of puranraz Bharava and that he was feeling so sad about Pandits, who had altogether stopped visiting the pious place of Puranraz Bharava. By the time the two had reached the lower gates of Sharika Bhawani, they seemed to maintain pace with each other. Since, the road had a slight turn ahead; the devotees usually bowed their heads at this spot with a prayer that Devi Sharika and Hari Bhagwati would shower blessings on them. No sooner did the lady turn her face towards Devi's Shilla than the man accompanying her seemed to have gone into hiding, never to be seen again. The incident took the lady by surprise. She could hardly believe her own eyes, for the person she had been talking to so far had disappeared all of a sudden. In a state of bewilderment, she narrated the story to every passerby, but no body took the incident so serious.However, some time later, while sitting in Lord Narayan Joo's temple, Krishna had a chance to meet a group of people, who wanted to discuss something important with the head/ Pradhan of the Mandir management committee. The boy offered his assistance in locating the house of the Pradhan. During the course of discussion, these people revealed that they had been facing problems, because of the presence of some supernatural power within the premises of Puranraz

Bharva. (The shrine had been under the management of Mandir Committee then). This group of people, belonging to Shia-sect of Muslim community, made a request that Narayan Joo Mandir committee should extend helping hand in maintaining the sacredness of the shrine. They confessed that the people living in the vicinity, unaware of the sanctity of the place, were polluting the water of holy spring, knowingly or unknowingly. They washed their dirty clothes or cleaned their vehicles or else threw filth into it, just out of sheer ignorance or disbelief. In order to avoid any further untoward occurrence, they offered to contribute funds for meeting the expenses for the upkeep of the shrine. Later on all local people together with number of Hindus from surrounding areas and members of temple committee built not only a small temple within the shrine but also raised the boundary walls around the premises, ensuring sort of restriction on frequent entry of people into the shrine. Meantime, Govt. also sanctioned funds for the piece of land belonging to the shrine that had been acquired for the construction of the road. It may be mentioned here that such instances were not rare prior to 1980s, for many a times Hindus who had abandoned some of their important places of worship for one reason or the other, made fresh effort at reviving the traditions, on the insistence of their Muslim brethren, who persuaded them not to ignore the responsibility of preserving sacredness of these places of worship, a rare display of religious tolerance. Undoubtedly, the contribution of such sagacious people in the development of the spirit of brotherhood amongst different faiths was widely appreciated by one and all. No wonder then that the Pandits felt a sense of gratitude for the people of the locality of Saazgaripora, which was so real and coming right from their heart that while the Pandits chanted hymns in praise of Puran Raz Bharava, they also prayed for the welfare of the people around. Is it not really depressing that the sincere display of the spirit of brother-hood had the impact that lasted only for few years? It was followed by a distressing pages of history. An unexpected turn of events during late eighties and early nineties, the time when insane elements had started creating mayhem. How could this shrine be an exception? They did not spare it too. Most probably the sacred spring has now been taken possession of or has gone under the cover of newly erected buildings. Nothing can be said with certainty about the plight of the spring or the entire water-body called Khushal Sar in the neighbourhood. The strangest part of it is that the fear of

supernatural powers which once existed in the minds of the local populace seems to have waned away or is no more there. The shrine could not be located during Krishna's visit (viz; after 1990). However,



On Way to Wanthpur from Ali Masjid, near Khushal-Sar

as per media reports the shrine has lately been visited by certain Pandits and efforts are on to revive the shrine to its original form once again. It is hoped that good sense prevails upon all the concerned, at-least for the sake of preserving the water body. Pertinent to mention here that before Mughal Emperor Akbar got the stone wall called Kallie erected around Hariparvat, Devi-Angan was extending up to Sidgiri-paad, present day Saazgari-pora Mohalla, the place that houses this shrine of Puran Raz Bharava. The area between Saazgari Mohalla and Devi-Ka-Angan is presently known as Hawal. However, in good old days, it was actually called as Shiver, probably, part of Soura locality of present times. The term "Shiver" is also related to an important shrine/ a holy place of Pushpatis, where pilgrims of this particular sect gathered to worship Pushpati-Nath. It is said that Raja Ranadethya and his queen Ranrambha-Devi built two temples here for the people of Pushpati sect. The couple also got Matth established at Predhuman peeth.

Krishna was feeling nostalgic about the holy place called Hariparvat; he wanted to be part of the morning Parikrama of Predhuman peetha/ Hariparvat once again, which used to be special feature of Hindu worship prior to migration. But then, he had a sudden recollection of important tit-bits that he, probably, had lost sight of earlier. A small place, he knew within Dhar-Mohalla, where mainly shia Muslims lived, was Khankhai-Sokhta. Probably, it had come into existence, after a Khankha was built in the area, while Sunni-Islam in Kashmir was still in infancy. Unfortunately, it suffered a complete damage in a big fire. Thus, the place acquired the name after that mishap. Again, former Hanfiya High School, renamed as Govt M.L.Higher secondary school, which un-officially, assumed the name of Dhar Bagh School, after it got shifted from its former location at Kani-Mazar to Saki-Daffer, its present site. Once an estate, it actually belonged to the family of one Late Balkaki Dhar, an aristocrat, who lived in it up to early 1950s.The estate consisted of palatial buildings, baladaries with terraces, ponds and fountains, flowering plants and shady trees, pathways and fortifications of walls with big gates for specific entries, all this once gave this place a look of an English castle. Its garden more or less resembled Mughal Baghs. The estate had virtually been abandoned in post-1950 period, either because of misfortune or political misadventure. It was in 1970s that the education department for purpose of extending the premises of Govt. Women's college at Nawa-Kadal, had taken over the boy's School building, forcing the shift of the Boys school to Dhar estates at Sakidafer, which bore a deserted look till that time. Many other prominent Kashmiri Pandits also owned big mansions in the area. One such exceptionally beautiful estate belonged to late Sham Lal Dhar, whose family had a magnificent temple built in-front of their palatial house, situated exactly on the right bank of Vitasta Nadhi in close vicinity of Safa-Kadal Bridge as mentioned earlier. The temple still in existence, reminds us of the richness of the past.Obviously, the highly influential and wealthy lords of the time, who in order to leave imprints of their aristocratic background on the scene, displayed their grandeur, by constructing big structures with majestic gates in this particular area.

Aali Kadal, financial capital of bygone, a place in the close vicinity of Safa-Kadal, also had a glorious past. Both the places have striking similarities. While Safa-Kadal had the distinction of producing the most outstanding personalities, which included,

ministers, courtiers, wazirs and people of great mettle, who not only played dominating role in shaping the political history of the state, but have also left indelible impact on past and present politics of Kashmir. Like-wise, Aali-Kadal, the centre of trade and commerce and other allied activities for a long time, housed well known families or even communities, including Punjabi speaking Khatris and well to do Koul families, who virtually ruled the state. Koul-Kothidars were amongst the wealthiest aristocrats, who, even, lent money to and financed the rulers of the state during the times of crises. In short, both the areas have been the centres of political as well as fiscal activities at one time or the other. Here also the aristocratic families owned big palatial buildings. The huge structures that existed, at-least up the end of late 1960s, which were later on left somewhat deserted, because of sudden shift of the inmates, who preferred civil lines during post-independence period and consequently the old structures had either been disposed of or dismantled by the owners and in their place new colonies of small houses came up. However, certain magnificent old structures are probably still in existence at Seheyar Ali-Kadal or Dhar Mohalla Safa-Kadal. The multi-storey buildings, standing on large plinth areas, with nearly forty to fifty hall like rooms, something that Kashmiris could boast off so for as their engineering skill and craftsmanship in olden days was concerned. These buildings had big gates /Darwazs for entry. Unfortunately, except these few buildings, very little of the past grandeur is left over.It would be worth while to visit places, especially, Seheyar and interior parts like Rehbab Sahib's Shrine and in particular Gurgari Mohalla. Besides the structures, number of saints lived here. Great saint, Swami Nand Lal Ji Maharaj was born in Gurgari Mohalla in 1902. He left a great legacy that continues to inspire and guide the masses. His disciples like Kral Bab, Vibeshan Ji, Mast Bab and others are amongst the well-known saints of the contemporary Kashmiri Hindu society. (A brief description on swami ji shall follow in later part of this book). The place is associated with many important Muslim personalities, to quote a few of them, Farsi poet Mulla Tahir Ganie (Perhaps Ganie Kashmiri), Mousuum Phanni and many more. The first two have their burial place situated just adjacent to Aali Kadal'. The rich families of such areas, if not all but majority of them, would employ army of body-guards stationed at their gates, as a symbol of clout or status. It was either the social hype or else it might have been their

compulsion. The average Hindu families, usually, preferred small doors for entrances to their houses. People say that during the reign of Afghan rulers, the Pathan chiefs had the liberty of intruding into the privacy of any house holder. Since, Pathans were tall and well built, rather bulky as compared to the weak bodied Kashmiris, people preferred their houses designed with entrances small and the passage so narrow that it would hinder the free movements and make it extremely difficult for a man of Pathan's constitution to pass through these doorways easily. Common folk raised cluster of houses connected by small passages, which could genuinely be considered as a safety measure. These doorways became the permanent feature of the houses owned by Kashmiri Pandits and the colonies of such houses formed the major part of the capital city in the valley.

Invaders from west Asian countries have more often brought misery and misfortune to Kashmir. Pathan regime, in particular, is infamous for the countless atrocities committed on poor hapless subjects of the valley. They have not only indulged in raping women, looting and killing thousands of innocent people without reason, but were also responsible for destroying the greatest treasure of knowledge that Kashmiris could otherwise boast off, as something having been inherited from their ancestors. Earlier, people in Kashmir had evolved a unique thought process that gave them a distinct identity. Studying the Nature in its totality with constant urge for exploration had enabled them to understand the secrets with great ease. Further, Gurukul system of education had widened their horizon, boosted their activities in varied spheres and sharpened their intellect, elevating them to such heights where seeking Gyana in its entirety was the sole or ultimate motive of their life. Since, their Gurus had intellect that bestowed them with ability to grasp and solve the most difficult riddles with ease. They followed a practice of both teaching and recording the rare findings in manuscripts or books. The precious toil and tireless efforts that the sages and scholars had put in for understanding the laws of Nature, would have tremendously contributed to the swift development of mind, had their thought probing experiences, their contributions and compilations not been subjected to the repeated onslaughts and the wholesale destruction by Afghans, Persians and other invaders from North west countries. The world could have been richer in literary wealth, but for the insanity of few hundred murderers, whose senseless acts de-voided the entire humanity of the benefits of early peep in to

unexplored branches of science that the explorers from Kashmir had tried at, more-so when human minds elsewhere were still struggling to learn the art of living. The mental vacuum created by crazy plunderers with their fanatical acts, has cost Kashmir's their self-confidence, essentially needed for establishing the lost link with the glorious past. No-doubt, a few learned people might have managed the safe passage by letting themselves into hibernation thereby avoiding destruction of whatever little literary material they could have laid their hand on before finally opting for migration to safer places, either, temporarily or on permanent basis. But these efforts were quite insignificant rather few and far between, which almost proved insignificant in regaining the lost glory. It fills one with great remorse that till recently neither the element of insanity stands curbed in complex societies, nor has the cultural assault on literature been stopped. Migration of Kashmiri Pandits in 1989 is the latest instance in this regard. The fundamentalist elements forced the entire community to leave their home and hearth.

These hapless people not only lost their roots, their identity but also their rare possessions and compiled wealth of literature atleast of recent past. The community has been left on the verge of extinction with a little hope of any recovery, despite the fact that this time it was not Afghan rule, but the local Government that had done all the mischief.

There have been instances that confirm the suppressive and intolerant policies practiced by foreign rulers, particularly Pathans, whose approach towards a section of the population not belonging to their religion or root has been absolutely ruthless. Let there be a try at capturing the public mood of bygone days so that the present generation understands the blatant truths without insertions or distortions, least out of biased thinking, just for arriving at the right conclusions. It is a fact that during Pathan rule Pandits were frequently subjected to the most humiliating treatment. They had to wear long Pharans with pockets one on each side. (On the left as well as on the right side.). Since, they grew a Bodhi, (hairlock, in the middle of the head/ Choog in Kashmiri), which the Pathan would use as a bridle during riding a man called pandit. A long piece of coloured cloth, better known as loonge, usually worn by the woman as part of the local dress, was at times used for a belt to support and bear the load of the rider. This so-called belt also offered the rider a

safe and a comfortable sitting on the shoulders of the man. It provided a perfect grip to the rider once he set his feet in two respective pockets of the Pandit's pharan for a pleasure ride. As a result of this practice, the subjects were so frightened that it was unthinkable of them to stand or speak or even raise voice against the inhumane treatment that they were so often subjected to. They avoided going down the lane that any Pathan was supposed to pass by. There is a saying in Kashmir, "Pathan deetheth gaceheh Faharsee phoorun (tagoone)", which means that at the sight of a Pathan one should be able to speak in Persian.Irrespective of the religious empathy, at times Pathans would hardly desist from acting in a most oppressive manner, even against the subjects belonging to their own religion.

Following instance would justify this observation. Two friends, one Hindu named Birjoo Dhar of Safa-Kadal and another a Muslim, Aziz Joo Gojwari, from Gojwara, Srinagar, both ministers in the Court of an Afghan Ruler, were critical of the suppressive policies of the despotic ruler. They tried their best to make the ruler understand the problems of the common masses and thus change the outlook for better governance of the state, but with little success. The ruler continued his inhuman treatment towards his subjects, who felt suffocated and as things crossed the limit, the two friends, upon due deliberations, decided to seek help from Maharaja Ranjeet Singh, a neighbouring Sikh Ruler. Accordingly, Birjoo Dhar and his son were deputed to Lahore for talks with powerful Sikh ruler. Before leaving for Lahore, Birjoo Dhar left his wife and daughter-in-law, to the care of his esteemed friend Mr.Gojwari. Somehow, Afghans got the wind of the so called conspiracy hatched against them. They captured Gojwari and tried to pressurize him for revealing the whereabouts of the family of Birjoo Dhar, but as a true Muslim, he refused to divulge any information that could lead Afghans to lay their dirty hands on the family that he had been entrusted with providing safety and protection. When they failed to extract any substantial information, they guillotined Gojwari on the spot. Immediately, thereafter, brutes succeeded in getting the clue that led them to raid on the hiding place. They took the two women of respect into their captivity. While these ladies were being shifted from Zakora to Babdem in a boat, they managed to consume poison from the rings they had been wearing. This way the two unfortunate noble ladies ended their life for the sake of honour. This was a turning point, as it aroused feeling of bitterness and hatred amongst the masses

against the tyrannical Afghan ruler, making the fall of Afgan ruler imminent. Happily this was followed by Sikh invasion led by Dogra commander, who inflicted a crushing defeat on Afghan army.

People, living under authoritarian regimes, do sometimes, invent classic devices to deal tactically with their vindictive bosses. The following interesting episode can perhaps explain such a state of affairs. A Pathan had a pandit in his employment. On one particular day, Pandit appeared before his master with coloured marks on his forehead, ears tips and his throat. Pathan asked him "Kaffir incheese" "Atheist, what do these coloured marks mean?" Pandit, who would apply tilak marks during the offering of his morning prayer, but subsequently ensured wiping off these marks before leaving for his work. That day, he had, probably, forgotten to wipe off these marks. Never-the-less, this ardent worshipper of Goddess Sarswati was aware of the political atmosphere prevailing around. As if, Goddess had set her abode on the tip of his tongue; he displayed an extra-ordinary sense of wit. All quarries raised by the master (the Pathan), were instantaneously replied by the Pandit with reasons that suited the occasion well. Regarding the mark of tilak on his forehead, he said, ("Kablayee neshan aasth khe Khudha yakh aast"), Sir the forehead mark authenticated the oneness of God. Pathan acknowledgingly said "Wah"/ "Bravo". Putting yet another question to him "(Kaffir eeneshan dhar goshan cheeseth)". Why the coloured marks on ear tips? Brahmin replied (Kablayee in dugwauhan aast ki Khudha yakh aast".) that the tilak marks on the two ear tips personified the two witnesses to this absolute truth of Oneness of God; one representing a Hindu and the other a Muslim. Pathan could not help but say "Marhabbah"/ wonderful. Pointing towards Brahmin's throat, he asked "Ee neeshan cheesth" why the mark on the throat? Brahmin replied, "Kablayh yagman nah manann, yelh man baawajodhe khi dugwah hand manann ki Khudha yakh aasth tale man likhe kablie garhdhan aasth." Whosoever denied acknowledging this fact was doomed to be beheaded/ guillotined. Brahmin in order to avoid further questioning by Pathan, added with quick assertion that certain people instead of one single mark personifying the oneness of God, bore three parallel horizontal lines with a central perpendicular line intersecting these on their forehead, these three horizontal lines and one vertical line stood for the trinity/ three in one (viz; three different forms of one God, the creator, the preserver and the destroyer or what one may call the differentiator

of past, present and future or three different effects of the creation/ birth, the evolution/sustenance and lastly the death/destruction, all evolving out of a single reason, signifying the cause behind His universal creation. (This theosophical concept of ancient Indians has stood the test of time).

(Note:' Tilak, a tradition of applying colour mark on forehead, ear tips and throat, has been in vogue from time immemorial amongst Hindus existing even up to this date, though no longer a daily feature, which it used to be some years back. This practice or tradition is now confined to certain special social occasions only. The mark was a sign of intellect and it did predict the health related condition of the person).

Stories are sometimes made out of fantasy. These serve as tools for expressing otherwise vulnerable truths. It can also be a means of giving vent to anger. The constant suppression of legitimate feelings at times cause a sudden outbursts, which most often result in instantaneous display of courage out of desperation. A story that follows, involves two contemporary characters, a Pathan and a Kashmiri Pandit, former having obvious links with the ruling class and the latter an ordinary citizen, destined to act within the limits of servitude. One can visualize the helplessness of an oppressed class, born to bear disgrace and dishonour all the time at the hands of the ruthless ruling class. Once, it so happened that a Pandit while passing over a bridge on River Jehlum confronted a Pathan by chance. Since, the Pandit bore moustaches with ends curved in an aristocratic way, an unusual feature, totally unexpected of a man of a subjugated class. Obviously, he was to become the source of irritation for one from ruling clan. Man in Pathan could hardly tolerate some one, a non-believer, having almost the similar type of moustaches that he himself bore. He directed the man to set his moustaches in order. But Pandit proved a different stuff; he refused to abide by the dictates of Pathan, which so infuriated the man that he started using abusive language and quickly drew his sword out to make the Pandit know his fate. As he was about to charge, Pandit managed to stop him midway, using the jugglery of words that carried sense even to a man of Pathan's nature. He told him that before they go in for a duel, it would be in their interest to have their family members eliminated in the first instance, as otherwise, the family of the slain one would be left uncared for. Pathan paused for a while; he could see convincing reason

in the suggestion. Meantime, they fixed an arena and agreed to meet there the next day. Pandit went home forgetting all that had happened, had his supper comfortably and before going to bed, looked at the style of his mustaches in the mirror. He lowered the tips of his mustaches moving his fingers over them without any sense of remorse. When he woke up in the morning, he did show no sign of worry at-least regarding his duel, scheduled later that day. Surely, he left his house in a quite relaxed mood; perhaps, his sole motive was, meeting his opponent, not for a duel, but for winning the battle without a fight. No sooner did he appear at the selected spot, his adversary drew his sword out. Since, Pandit had chosen a safer place for himself; he pretended not to offer any resistance to Afghan's action. He knew that he was consciously ignoring his earlier role of inciting Pathan into committing an act of homicide. His blatantly putting forth an offer, without caring for the Pathan's reaction, was nothing but an act to irritate the opponent. His readiness at making amends in the style of his moustaches, which Pathan had proposed himself at the beginning, was sure to produce lot of heat. Choice of words could hardly pacify the anger of Pathan. It could not be expected to be a right solution for achieving a possible truce. By extending the argument that there was no scope for the two to stain their swords or that the only viable course for the two opponents was to bury the hatchets then and there, was perhaps a deliberate attempt at adding insult to injury. Before Pathan could respond to this rubbish and give practical shape to his anger, the man called Pandit allowed no room for the counter reaction. The typical clown had let down his opponent in a distinctive way. Everybody was left speculating as to how Pandit had managed a slip from the site through the suffocating crowd that had gathered there to witness the bloody bout. He had really succeeded in tactfully avoiding any direct confrontation. In the end, Pathan had to leave the place in a state of total disgust. The story may be concocted, but in real life situations, it is a true depiction of an authoritative attitude of ruthless ruling class and the sense of fear that the common people continuously lived in or for that matter of fact, courage out of desperation shown at times by suppressed class. It leaves no doubt in the mind that the people lived at the whims and fancies of the ruling class. The continued suppression was bound to have its toll and in the course of time people suffered from a sort of complex. They became permanently meek and weak. Fear of persecution together with sense of helplessness made them

mentally wreck and physically paralyzed. Certain negative traits, like introvert nature, absence of fellow-feeling, individualistic approach and lack of co-operation amongst fellow beings, became some of the features that persisted till recently and as a result of these characteristics the pandit community as a whole was subjected to frequent taunts. Following extract would certainly make the readers to go through such weak spots.

Two pedestrians had an altercation, which soon turned in to a wrestling bout, in which the stronger of the two threw his opponent down and started giving him sufficiently good beating. Somehow, the man on the floor caught sight of the sacred thread that the man beating him was wearing. A sudden and a loud shout came out of his mouth, which could be heard from a distance, a feeling that expressed the sense of shock at being overpowered by a man from docile Pandit community. The person, who was receiving a good beating so far, gave his opponent such a forceful push that in the very next moment, the man so far in commanding position, was suddenly overcome by the fear of his disclosed identity. Immediately thereafter, he found himself under the rain of blows. In a matter of seconds, he was seen lying unconscious on the ground. "Dallhi-Bhatte, Dallhi-Gadveh," said the other guy,"How could a Kashmiri Brahmin, consumer of dal tehe battah (pulses and rice), win the bout." These anecdotes have been recorded not to defame or insult any particular community, but to explain the development of traits and their continuance as a permanent feature. It may sound strange but it is true that the members of K P community were so cool by nature that they hardly reacted even in the extreme situations like somebody pinching the bottom of one of their women folk in their very presence. Their response in such precarious circumstances would be putting the blame on their fairer sex, using fabricated and fictional excuses only to avoid confrontation and rightly so. They would instead advise their partners not to let any chance for impolite people to act rude. Thus, the ladies were required to follow a long list of precautions for avoiding such harassments that at times proved quite frustrating. But then there was also a brighter side to such a nature. Kashmiri Hindus have from time immemorial been the worshippers of Goddess Shakti/ Sarasvati, (As the emanations of Mahesvari or Tripurasundari, other two forms are Maha-Kali and Maha-Laksmi). Because of Her blessings, Kashmiri aborigines have always kept their heads cool, even in extremely difficult situations, they were supposed to follow

Dharma, live a truthful, simple and thoroughly disciplined life. They preferred acquiring knowledge to just seeking life full of comforts. This paved a way not only for their purposeful life, but also an assurance for elevation of their souls. Such an approach definitely identified the distinctness of blood that ran through their veins. Unusual upheavals, as for instance, recent migration of almost entire Hindu population to Jammu and other parts of the country, may have changed the thought perception of the community to some extent, especially, when all the parameters are presently at variance. But, history is witness to the fact that even the slightest shift from the set path at any point of time has put the community to great sufferings. Adopting alien characteristics even unwillingly for the sake of survival at times has more often proved counter productive and has put the people to a disadvantageous position. Therefore, there is absolutely no need practicing easy approach. Leaving the acquired negative traits apart, the main culture that grouped the people into a distinct community of Kashmiri Pandits, stand for the best that human evolution can offer, which may to an extent be true even today. Therefore, there is hardly any scope for effecting alteration in the dynamic contours of this community. Pandits can serve their community as well as others better, if they adhere to the qualities; their fore-fathers were reputed and respected for. The fact that no less than a great historian, of the fame of Abul Fazl, while acknowledging the virtues of this section of Kashmiri society, gave following short but apt description, "*The Brahman class was numerous, although Kashmir had a dialect of its own, the learned books were in the Sanskrit language and they had separate characters which they used for manuscript work chiefly on Burz (Tuz), the bark of a tree. The majority of the narrow minded conservatives of blind tradition were the Sunnis. The Imams and Nurbakshises could hardly tolerate and were perpetually at strife with each other. They were chiefly from Persia and Turkestan. The most respectable class in this country was that of Brahmans, who, notwithstanding their need for freedom from the bonds of tradition and custom, were true worshippers of God. They did not loosen the tongue of calumny against those not of their faith nor did they beg nor importune. They employed themselves in planting fruit trees, which they felt, was generally a source of benefit to all the people.*"

Krishna, who had already expressed his desire of having parikrama round Hariparvat, did start preparing himself for a Parikrama scheduled early next morning for offering of prayer at the holy place. He had to hire an auto- rickshaw. On reaching the place, he performed the puja with devotion and started assessing the change that had taken place since migration. Meantime he tried to gather the material, important for describing in detail, the sanctity of this holy place.

Chapter III (Part A)

Hari Parvat, the Kendra-Bindoo of Kashmiri Culture

Hariparvat, or as locals call it, Sharika-peeth, Predhuman-peeth or Sri-Sidhapeeth, is not a simple hillock, but a representation of an undaunted faith, a symbol of distinct culture and the most visible mark of the earliest civilization. Legend tells us that, people living on the mountain tops, (surrounding Sati-sar), once approached Kashyap Rishi, (the aunsh of Mata Sati, the Mother Earth), with a request to kill Jalodbhava, (The water demon, a creation of sin), who had been constantly posing threat to the life and property of the people. Consequently, Kashypa made a resolve to teach Jalodbhava a lesson. He pleaded before Mother Goddess to bestow upon him Her divinely grace so that he could mitigate the sufferings of the devotees. Pre-determined to set a change in the topography of the region, Goddess Sarika Herself decided to take a flight over the lake and in the course of Her aerial survey, She made a pebble to drop from the beak of a sparrow (Myna), which She had taken the form of Herself that moment. (The pebble was a portion of Meeru Hills). It produced a terrible shake in the deep and serene waters of the lake. The vibrations, thus, produced underneath the lake were so strong that the mountainous ranges near present day Baramulla were torn apart and water started trickling down through the newly formed passage, thereby, emptying almost the entire bowl off its water. The great churning also assisted in the process of appearance of Sri-yantra; the Hariparvat, being pushed over to the surface, exactly similar to the Sprouting of lotus out of water. This emergence of the Parvat gave a shape to the scattered land masses and shallow water bodies that came to be guarded on permanent bases by already existing mountains on all sides. This way, the beautiful vale of Kashapamar /Kasheer or Kashmir came in to being. However, it took some time for land masses to dry and left over water bodies to survive the major Nature backed corrections. The people primarily living on the mountain tops gradually started coming down to settle on the newly formed plains. Interestingly, Geologists and Geographists hold almost the same view point that emptying of Sati-Sar of its water content

was a geographical phenomenon, initiated by evolutionary changes which arbitrarily determined its future settings. The scientists say that the primitive civilization of the vale of Kasheer/ Kashmir is almost as old as the creation of land mass out of the Lake. They put the date of the commencement of the process of draining water from Sati-Sar around three to four lakh years back. Some people subscribe "Kashmir", name given to the "Lake turned vale", derived from the composition of three syllables, Ka meaning the water, Ashm; the mountains and Ir the passage for the flow. *They say that Kashyaps were a branch of Aryan race that had arrived here from Caspian Sea. This branch had to their credit the establishment of places like, Afganisthan/Kaferistan, Sindhu-Kush/Hindu-Kush and Kasghar etc. Rishi Logakh in plain words describes Kashmir as place of Kashaps who by nature believed in yoga and yaga and thus gave importance to the performance of all types of yagnas. They worshipped Shiva and His consort Shakti, especially, Shakti in the acknowledged forms emanating from Her, viz; Kameshvari Sharika or Chakrishouri at Pradhuman Peeth in Srinagar and Saraswati or Shardha Devi in Sardhi Village;*

Nilmat Purana, written somewhere in 200 B.C, gives a fairly identical description of the evolution of this sacred land, but in a slightly different perspective. An extract/excerpt has been taken from a Puranic Katha, where Prajapati, is seen busy performing rituals relating to the marriage ceremony of his daughters. He is informed about the arrival of his son-in-law, Lord-Siva, the husband of Sati, (His eldest daughter), who had worn the attire hardly befitting the occasion. In-fact, he had nothing on, except a lone loin cover with a snake for a muffler and a necklace of human skulls hanging round His neck, His body all smeared with ash from cremation ground. Prajapati had never thought of inviting such an eccentric guest at the wedding ceremony of his daughters. Lord Siva had also expressed his intention of not attending the function as an uninvited guest. But, on the insistence of His wife, Sati, He was compelled to accompany Her. Since Prajapati publically taunted Lord Siva, a woman, in Sati could hardly tolerate the ill-treatment that Her husband had met with at the hands of Her father. In a fit of anger and an overwhelming frustration She could think of no other option but to jump in to the sacrificial fires (Hawan Kund). Lord Siva, in a bid to save the life of His half burnt better-half, had to immerse Sati in the waters of a Lake that He created on the spot. Later on, Sati

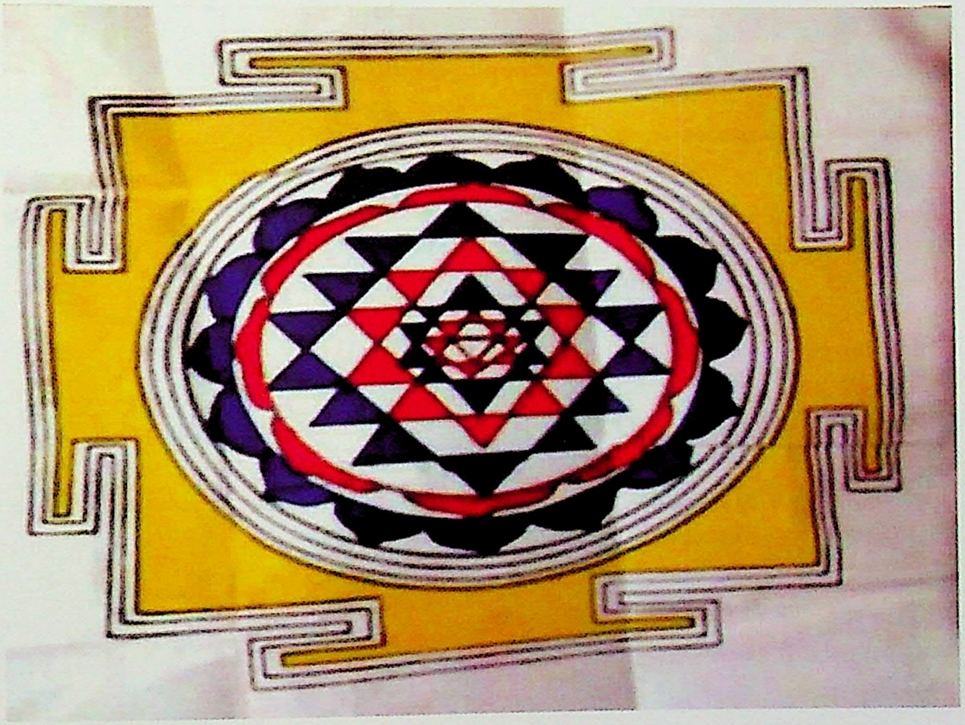
took the possession of the entire Earth within Her lap and held the waters of Sar in Her bosom. This is how Sati-Sar came in to being. Scriptures further state that the process of the transformation of Sati Sar into a valley, was the consequence of an incident involving a chanced visit of Dev-Raj Indra and his consort Mata Sacci on the banks of this lake in a playful mood. Daitya chief, Sangrahsutra by name, on catching the sight of the most beautiful Sacci Mata, had an instantaneous urge and consequently discharged the semen in to the lake. Observing the ill intentions of Sangrahsutra, Devraja killed the demon in due course of time. However, the seed got sprouted in the form of a bony neonate. It was brought up by Nagas. The baby came to be known as Jalodbhava (water born). He grew up into a massive giant, who would frequently bring about devastation and was a persistent threat to the lives of local inhabitants. Since, Mata Sati, the Goddess Earth, who had taken the form of a boat carrying Sati Sar in her bosom, thought that Jalodbhave, who continued to plague(infest) the lake and often ventured to tread unceremoniously, making the life full of woes both in water and on the shores, needed to be given a deterrent punishment. Meantime, the mountain dwellers also pleaded before Neelnaga to call upon Kashyapa Rishi requesting him to implore upon Mother Goddess, to make the devotees free from continous sufferings. Goddess, Tripura-Sundari (Ashthadashbugee/ Sharika/ chakrishori/ Chandika/Haari/ Sidha-Laxshmi/ Durga, Ragnaya by whatever name one may call Her), had to appear in the form of Myna called Her in Kashmiri, at the request of Her son. She, thus, raised Pradhmuna-pitha/ Sidhpitha or the Hariparvat out of Sati-sar, emptying the lake of almost the entire reserve of water by creating a fissure in the mountain at Khadanyar, Baramulla and simultaneously, teaching the demon a lesson. Thus, Hariparvat/ Parbat, the symbol of Sri-Chakra, became permanent abode of Chakrishour and Chakrishori.

The Hariparvat, the manifestation of Lord Siva in Para Sakti, is, a pre-planned activity involving the phenomena of cause and effect. Chakrishour/ Kameshour and Kameshouri reside here in Shunia, the Bindoo, the centrally located point, a dimensionless space, in the region, formed by nine triangles, five with apices upwards superimposed on four triangles with apices pointing downwards, forming Shiv-Chakra and in the case of Sakti Chakra, four triangles with apices upwards placed on five with apices downwards. The superimposed triangles in both Chakras in turn enclosed by two concentric rings each formed by two consecutive circles, containing eight and sixteen

lotus petals respectively around the triangles, guarded by three circles and consecutive three squares with four entries. The figure so formed is what is called, Sri-yantra/ Sri-Chakra / Shakti Chakra. The three main components of Sri-yantra/ Sri-Cakra are thus:-

i) inner portion comprises of the central dimensionless point (Bindu), the primary triangle (Trikona) and the figure of eight corners (Astakona) symbolizing bliss; ii) the middle portion consisting of figure of ten angles (Antardasara), followed by another figure of ten angles (Bahirdasara) and the figure with fourteen angles (catur-dasara) standing for control over the world/ preservation; and iii) the outer portion comprising of eight petalled lotus (Ast-dal-padma), the sixteen petalled lotus (Sodasa-dala-padma) and the square field (Bhupura), representing the extension.

THE MYSTIC CHAKRA OF TRIPURA SUNDARI



Sri- yantra/ Sri-Chakra

Precisely, the Sri-Chakra comprises of forty three triangles formed out of superimposition of five and four triangles, their subsequent intersection contained within six consecutive circles, twenty four lotus petals, enclosed in the two inner concentric rings, formed by inner three circles having eight lotus petals drawn in the first inner ring, followed by sixteen petals contained in the second ring formed out of 2nd and 3rd inner circles depicting sixteen

phases of Moon, the Bindoo at the common centre of circles. All these components are further guarded from outside by three outer circles and three square figures containing four windows each. The entire figure so formed connote to nine chakras, starting from central Bindoo, Sarvanandmaya usually represented by red colour, central white triangles described as Sarvasidhipradha, eight red triangles as Sarvoroghara, ten blue triangles as Sarvarakshakar, ten red triangles, the Sarvarthasadhak, fourteen blue triangles, the Sarvasaubnagyadayak, eight red lotus petals as Sarvasamksobhan, sixteen blue lotus petals as Sarvaparipuraka and the yellow ground between the outer circle and the four gates called as Trilokamohan. The body of Mother Goddess is described by the power of inward intuition, called Vimarsah Shakti. When the Divine body is brought into effective consciousness of devotee, it is called Sri-Vidya/ Shri-Vidhya. Its verbal expression is Mantra and visual expression is yantra or Sri-Chakra. The two are essentially identical. Shakti-Chakra is the yantra that depicts goddess Lalita/Sarika, with all the virtues associated with Her name.

To understand such tough theosophical concepts, one has to have an elevated mind set with ability to solve riddles and patience to undertake vigorous mental exercises. Thinkers say," Sri-parvat really stands for the geometrical representation of Maha Sri-yantra composed of small particulates, which portray the micro-form of Sri-yantra, while integrated body of micro Sri-chakras form the macro-representation of all the individual particulates, or Sri-yantras. The varied combinations of particulates forming sheillas of different Deities, like Mahakali's sheilla, Sidhlaxima's Sheilla and the Sharika Sheilla with bindoo, the Union of Chakrishour and Chakrishouri and the Sheilla of Sidh-lakshmi, like-wise, Sheillas at all specific places, Sheetala, Haari, Maha-Lakshmi, Ashtadujbaza, Bargheshakha, Durga, Jawala, Bala, Zeeshita, Bhavani-shori, Badra-Kali, Sharda, Sheelhputree, Kanimaaj, Kulashvari, Maha-Kali, Tankdharini (the one who wears "Ta the Tankar or Dejhuru), Oma, Maha-Maya and Aashta-Dashbuja, respond to specific composition of particulates, but all originating from Goddess Sakti/ Tripura, the power of Siva, Just like the scent emanating from flowers, which can actually be perceived around the Hariparvat, provided there is purity of mind and faith in Siva and His consort.

Going back to the description of Hariparvat, one can understand the significance this sacred hillock has in Koushur culture and moreso for Kasmiri Pandits. It should not surprise that places around it have been the centre of activity throughout the ages. Even the city of Sri-Nagri came into the existence in the periphery of this pious hillock. Krishna recalls that whenever he had the opportunity of having parikrama round the auspicious hill with his Grand father, he was

required to follow a set of instructions; viz covering the entire distance bare footed; not to venture picking up or disturbing even the smallest pebble from its place; maintaining complete silence during entire course of the parikrama round the holy Siddha peetha. He recollects that the moment they entered Bachi Darwaza, his grand father would seldom open his mouth, probably he would have been chanting holy mantras from within. All elderly people including grand father believed that the place was an abode of Lord in all His forms; viz; all Gods and Goddess that Hindus worship. He would say that a true devotee does not necessarily need to undergo any hard penance for attaining His bliss, for this place was bestowed with such divinely powers that prayers offered sincerely even for a fraction of a second were enough to change the heavens. People say that whosoever had the opportunity of offering prayers at this place has never gone empty handed. The Parikrama in early hours of morning would begin with prayers of Adi-Deva at Ganesh temple adjacent to Mukdoom Sahib's Zeyarath, just below Jawala Bhagwati's shilla. Before entering the Ganesh temple, devotees, would usually visit Jawala Bhagwati's sheilla for having Bhagwati's darshna and would subsequently pay respects to Saint Mukdoom Sahib at the gates of his shrine, which had stairsteps going up his Zeyarathgah on the southern tip of the hill. People, especially, farmers would come with pitchers full of water from far off places with the belief that their great penance would please the great saint and thus bestow them with timely rains. Surely the saint never failed them in their belief. Devotees used to stand at the gates of this zeyarat for hours together. The early morning Parikrama round the holy Parbat during pre-migration days would give an esthetic feel and it also activiated the entire body system. Sages say that there exists a *divine connect between two sacred places of Hariparvat and Sharda peetha, which they hold are actually complimentary to each other. They describe the two holy places both situated in Kashmir, as the two distinctive seats of Shakti emanation, in which the Shilla at Hariparvat depicts union of Sarika (Chakrishouri) with Chakrishoura in a mode of yantra, while the Sheilla at Sardhi, portraying Mata Sharda, as the symbol of Vak / power of speech. The devotees worship Lalita/Sarika at Sarika Peeth for salvation and Sharda at Sardhi/ Sharda Peeth for seeking a boon of wisdom; the ultimate knowledge. Thus, Sarasvati, the consort of Brahma the creator, is worshipped as Lalita or Sarika, the embodiment of prosperity and wisdom (Smvradhi and Gyana) and*

Sharda or Vagisvari as the giver of essence and the supreme deity of speech or power of knowledge (Vaakh or Mahavidya), both representations of Brahmi, the consort of Brahma. In the post-Vedic period, people acknowleged the presence of all pervading truth, which is beyond perception and conditionalities, both in dynamic as well as in static states, in infinite and finite form, concentrated in Shunneih, the zero as well as emerging out of it. The conditional entities emanating from Shakti find repose in Para-Bindu, the centre of power of creation and absorption. Shakti being quite inseparable from its holder, the Lord Siva, the transcendent Self. His Shakti is the Para-Shakti an immanent/ inherent and manifold (viz; the natural energies of Knowledge, power and action).The trichotomic aspect of Para-Shakti; takes the forms of Mahakali (Parvati), Mahalakshmi (Durga) and Maa-sarasvati (Sharada), the three main deities, as per functional requirements of time and space. But, these manifestations are the creation of one and the only one Mother Mahesvari or Tripurasundari, the par-Shakti, excelling the emanations of Kali, Lakshmi and Sarasvati, each individually represented by truth, beauty and wisdom respectively. Trident held by Siva or His Shakti (Tripurasundari) in hand symbolizes the three functional manifestations. The Para Shakti/ Tripura, outshining in beauty, is thus the Primal Energy that transcends the three divine deities. Tripura holds the universe completely in Her self-effulgence. She is the sovereign power of Her own will and is manifested in everything in triple form. She, who is prior to three powers, Herself, the inherent fourth, the incomprehensible, unperceivable, formless form, fine and beyond the understanding of mortals. Tripura, (para Shakti), is the power that rules the three worlds of cosmic life (Bhuh, Bhuvah, Svah), or three stages of human life (Jagrat, Svapna, Susupti) or the three states of spiritual life. The Sakta doctrine acknowledges, Tripura as the sovereign deity of the fifteen syllables with their respective mantrabias- Aim, Klim, and Sauh. One thousand names of Mata Shakti compiled and composed in the form of verses titled "Bhawani Sahasarnaam", describe each name as a particular characteristic of Mother Goddess. "Sunderlahri and Panchastavi" also the hymns sung in praise of Her limitless power and unparallel beauty. These verses describe the assumed physical features of Mother Goddess, attributing each with virtue. The eighteenth verse of the first part of Laghustavah identifies Mother with names, "Maya, Kundalini, Kriya, Madhumati, Kali, Kala, Malini, Matangi, Vijaya, Jaya, Bhagavati,

Devi Siva, Shambhavi, Sakhti, Sankarvallabha, Trinayana, Vagvadini Bhairavi, Himkari Tripura, Paraparamayi, and Mata Kumari Tasay". The significance of reciting this verse lies in the fact that arrangement of the names of Shakti in the form of hymn serves as a prescription for understanding the true nature of Her bliss. Every name here carries definite meaning. The English translation of the beautiful verses from" Pancastavi" with illustrations has beautifully been accomplished by Pt. J.N.Koul (Kamal). As per his translation, Mother Goddess is called as Maya, as She represents the essential power of Cidrupa Brahma, (The all pervading consciousness, the cause of manifesting, maintaining and withdrawing the universe), Kundalini, (The hidden energy of the body or the very life of the mind, the creative power of Siva, which grants the state of self realization), Kriya, the Kriya Shakti, (The power of general dynamism of consciousness, called spontaneity/ naturalness. She has the power of assuming any and every form.), Madhumati is the essence of all juices; (joy of a spiritual-self), Kali (The possessor of the power that wields time. She is without a beginning or an end). Kala, (It is the power of Siva in all His aspects. She bears the colour of a deep black sea, which in reality is colourless and transparent, when examined from a close range. Kala also stands for the subtlest aspect of creativity, an expression of Kriya Shakti, which is beyond time), Malini, (The possessor of the power of letters, which holds the entire universe within Herself). Matangi, (She- grants desired boon to her devotees. She is graceful. Her name as Vak, means perfect in the knowledge of Brahma, *describing Her universal-self with no object-subject relation), Vijaya(The purity of Consciousness that grants victory over attitude of sense organs), Jaya, (The Goddess that frees one of action, inaction and fruit thereof), Bhagavati, (The Goddess, who knows the origin and the dissolution of the universe. She understands both ignorance and knowledge. She has the key to the cause of appearance and disappearance of beings. She is full with six eternal glories manifesting from Siva), Sambhavi, (The Goddess permeated with Supreme or Siva-conciouness, while in a state of Siva), Shakti, (The power of Siva to create, sustain and withdraw the same into the source.This form is sometimes called Kamesvari), Sankarvallabh, (The beloved of Sankara, Kamesvara, indistinguishably one with Kamesvari), Trinayana, (The three eyed Mother (the Cit Shakti), Vakvadini, (Persuades speech (Vak) internally), Bhairavi, (The power of eternal prosperity of Bharava/*

Siva) Hrimkari (Hrimkari, the Divine Mother, in whom the love of Siva shines supreme), Tripura, (The Mother Herself representing the primal energy, the Para-Shakti, transcending the three divine deities / the three Gunas (Vimarsa)), Mata, (The Goddess Kulasundari is the source of all energies) and Kumari, (The ever new divine effulgence that destroys the sense of duality).

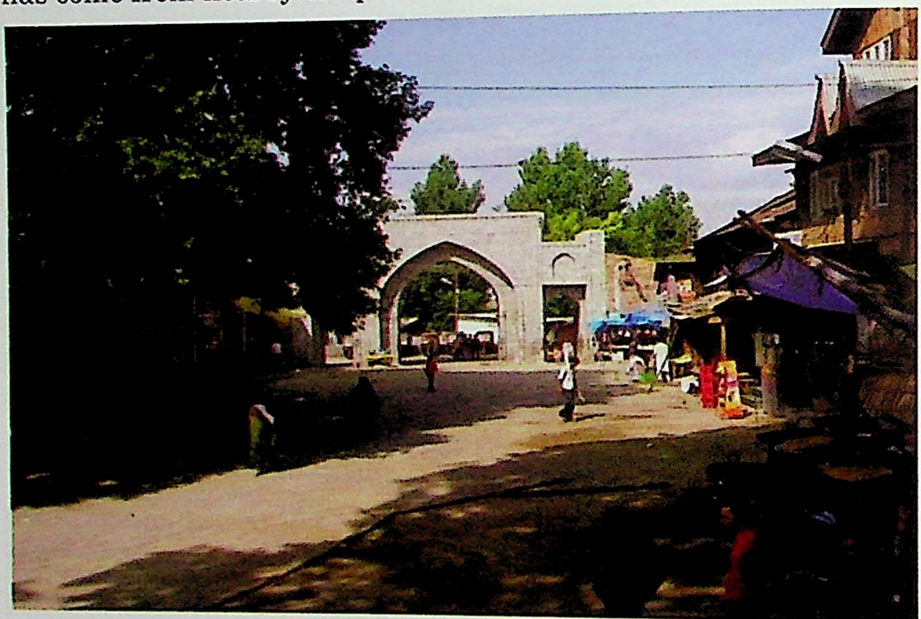
Krishna had decided to start his Parbat prikrama from Gojwara end, before reaching the *big stone gate, part of * Kaliie, called the Bachi Baran or Bachi Darwaza, he stopped a few steps to the right of the fore-mentioned entrance, where a vast piece of land lays barren. Records reveal that once two big magnificent stone temples of marvelous architectural beauty stood there, which were desecrated, destroyed and plundered by Sikandar-Buteh-Shikan, father of Zain-ul-Abuddin/ Badshah, who at first inspite of all pressure that the Maulvis brought upon him, persisted in his endeavour to keep his hands clean of religious persecution, had later on reluctantly to yield to the specious arguments of his minister Suhabhatta, who had originally been a Hindu, but since his conversion to Islam, hated his former co-religionists with the deep-rooted and implacable hatred of neophyte. (Reference has been taken from pt. R.C. Kak's book, "Ancient Monuments of Kashmir") (Kaliae is a fortification around Hariparvat, made up of lime, sand, bricks and stones, built at the instance of the Mogul king, Shah-n-shahi Akber.).*

As per available literary sources and the book, referred to above, wherein Kak Sahib quotes," The traces of king's reluctance, whether real or simulated, altogether vanished once he gave his written consent. It is said that in Sikandar, religion ran wild; some succumbed before the storm, but those who did not, were ruthlessly broken. Cremation of the dead was prohibited. Libraries containing priceless books and manuscripts compiled during centuries of toil were destroyed in no time. Further, Non-Muslims could not wear caste marks, like tilaks or bindi etc. Orders were issued proscribing residence of any, but Muslims in the valley. When the people began to leave in large numbers, the King and his minister deliberately permitted them to proceed to the frontier and then closed their passage to exit. Being caught in the trap, they were driven back with the option either to accept death or conversion. The majority came under pressure and changed their faith, while a few brave souls gave up their lives willingly for the cause. The great shrines of Chakradhara and

Vijayeswara were razed to ground; the Martand and Avantipur temples were so irreparably ruined that even the man with calm and composed nature is left conjecture at the manner of their destruction. According to Mr. Kak, Jonaraja, most widely known historian after Kalhana, had felt his feelings more embittered against Suhabhatta than against Sikandar. He tells us that there was no city or town, no village or forest, where an abode of God escaped destruction by Suhabhatta. All the images of gods and goddesses were broken and surprisingly no misfortune was seen to befall the perpetrators of the deed, as was normally expected to be the natural outcome of such acts."

The priceless texts on varied subjects, rare manuscripts, quality material content including master-pieces in literature written in Sanskrit, shardha and other languages, using bhojpatra or specially designed cloth, compiled during ages by scholars of repute in scripts that include Devnagri and local shardha, well preserved in libraries, were burnt, destroyed or taken away and recklessly dumped somewhere in Dal Lake along with dead bodies of those, who had resisted and finally laid down their lives vainly trying to save the store-house of knowledge from destruction. The valuable material thrown into the lake by the plunders, later on formed a sort of embankment that came to be known as Bhatta Suthoo. The ruins of the temples destroyed in the vicinity of Bachi Darwaza could be seen till recent past, though people managing the nearby mosque have lately sealed the area and cleared the scattered material/ broken pieces of stones with slightly disfigured images carved on them, which never bothered these people earlier. The dumped ruins on roadside in the vicinity of the place has started haunting these zealots, especially when these priceless pieces of stones reveal the history exposing their explosive nature. A beautifully carved wooden door frame portraying swasthika, shatkona or probably omkara carved on the front side, may still be seen existing there as a part of probably the out house of a mosque.The portion of the land, the site of once desecrated and the razed structures of temples had already been converted into the graveyard, while ruins of one temple structures were left almost un-touched and these ruins would even lay scattered on roadside. The material of another razed temple had found the use in building Bahu-ud-Din sahib's mosque, centuries before.The post-1990 period change is quite noticeable, because there has been an attempt to lid the truth on desecration. On Baachibaran side, these

ruins have been removed and a wall erected out of the same ruins, covering the site as well as side walls of Bahu-ud-Din sahib's mosque. The sculptural marks on stone slabs on which the wall structure stands along the road leading to Baachi Darwaza, a pathway to lord Ganesha's temple and Mukdoom sahib's Shrine can still be traced. Even the Bahuuldin Sahib's mosque on the hinder side bears testimony to the fact that the entire material used in its construction has come from nearby temples ruins.



Newly constructed stone Gate in the neighbourhood of Baachi Barren Gate

Till recently, on the northern side, one of the desecrated temples, having carved stone slabs with base, which served as a wall to the razed temple land, had at places dancing girls carved on them or broken part of the pranali, used earlier for carrying the holy water to be poured over the Lingam, but presently part of material used in the reconstructed wall base more often creat curiosity. Moving inside the premises, one can find the inscriptions on the puers calligraphed mostly in Sanskrit (Sharadha script), which may confuse the visitor, but the fact is that at the beginning of the Muslim rule and even much later, the official language followed by Nawabs of the state was Sanskrit. Of-course the script used, was a locally developed Sharada lipee.

As regards the Ganesh temple, where-from usual prabhat-phari would start in early morning hours, legend has it that Lord Ganesha's

Sheilla rotated automatically through a straight angle (180 degrees), while Sikandra–Buht-shiken was busy destroying the nearby temples. This mayhem must have taken a great toll of life of a particular community.



Lord Ganesha's shilla at Hari Parvat Srinagar

But then, this was just a passing phase, a nightmare that was better to be forgotten, as the people were soon to be blessed with a king, from the same dynasty, who at his very early age, understood the secret that gives any ruler a successful run. But, it was not until he himself faced upheavals, especially, on account of his serious illness, which broadened his vision. Soon after ascending the throne, the King Zain-ul-abidin, developed a skin sore, which gave him unbearable pain. State physicians tried their best to cure him or atleast bring some relief to him, but all their efforts proved a failure. They declared his disease a terminating one. At last, one Brahmin, named Sirya Bhatta, (Shree Bhatta), was called in. He succeeded in curing the ailing king. They say that some pious Brahmin girl, once while fetching water in her earthen ware vessel (PITCHER) from river vitasta, was seen by the heir apparent, who was going down the river in a pirandha (AN OPEN BOAT). He was so amused at the blooming beauty that he in his royal style thought it within his right to tease the lass by setting his gullaalh in position and aiming his

target at her pitcher, which by now was on the head of the girl. As she was about to turn and move up the bank, the stone shot from the gullaalh struck the pitcher. It broke into pieces and water rushed down the body of the girl, drenching her from head to feet. She was so upset that in a fit of anger, she spelt a curse, of-course, in a whispering voice, hardly overheard by other ladies, except the one standing just adjacent to her. The incident had shocked the entire women folk present at the spot. They could do nothing except witnessing the plight of the girl, as mute spectators. But, she was no ordinary lass and the curse she spelt was no less than a deadly arrow that she had shot at, with the expectation of immediate and definite results. Her three dimensional curse simply meant that the person responsible for her plight should get a boil on his foot, second, that the same should find cure at the hands of a Hindu and last but not the least, that the part of the medicine be the ash of her grass slipper that she was wearing. It is presumed that the girl might have been related to Sirya Bhatta, the Vaid somehow. It was this competent Vaid, who later on treated and succeeded in curing the King of the dreadful disease. When the king recovered, he was pleased to send for Sirya Bhatta. Responding to the invitation of the King, Sirya Bhatta presented himself immediately after being summoned. The King on his part showed his gratitude to the man by receiving him with great honour.

He wanted Sirya Bhatta to ask for favours in return of the invaluable services rendered in curing his disease. Sirya Bhatta humbly replied that as a Vaid, it was the part of his duty and that by the grace of God; he had everything he needed and therefore, wanted nothing for himself. But the king continued to insist. At this Sirya Bhatta politely expressed his desire to see all the subjects irrespective of the religion, caste or colour being treated equally and allowed to live without any restriction. He further added that he would think of having achieved heavens, if the king granted his approval to his three cherished wishes. Before the contents of the wishes could be disclosed by Sirya Bhatta, Budshah was eager to give his assent without any further pause or hesitation. While expressing his gratitude to Budshah, Sirya Bhatta opened his mind saying that he wanted his Hindu brethren, of- course, the subjects of the king, to be exempted from jazzia (the tax of two palas of silver, required to be paid by Non-Muslim subjects). Secondly, that his Hindu brethern be allowed to

worship according to their faith and belief and lastly that this section of the society be treated as equals in the eyes of law, granting them equal opportunity, whether, it was participation in the affairs of the state or holding of state jobs or having the right to education. The king was so pleased at the selfless and straight forward approach of the man that he not only granted the man his three cherished wishes, but also made him chief-Justice and high Treasurer/Finance Minister in his Darbar/ Cabinet. This was the beginning of the great era of the great king, who later attained still greater heights, for which he aptly got the title of Bud-shah, the Pathchah. It is said that he possessed a multi-dimensional/multi-facet personality. A great builder, a Nature lover, a true secularist and above all, pioneer and promoter of handicrafts in Kashmir, Sultan-Zain-ul-Aabideen/Shahi Khan crowned as ruler of Kashmir in 1423 A.D, knew that during the reigns of Sultan Sikandar and Ali shah, Hindus had been ruthlessly crushed and maltreated. He, thus, adopted a very considerate approach. He opened schools and training institutes for general masses. He had to his credit the introduction of such professional crafts amongst the people of Kashmir, as carpet weaving, Namda-kari, kalm-kari, paper-mashy, wood-carving, Seechin-dozee, Gabba and shawl-embroidery etc., for which he is said to have imported skilled craftsman from Iran, Afghanistan and other west Asian countries.

Some of the buildings built during his reign still exist. A unique Tomb at Zaina-Kadal, Zaina Dab, a hub of beautiful buildings constructed in Nowshera' Vicharnag area, (probably not in existence now), Zaina Laank, a small Island approximately 90x 75 square yards in dimensions located in famous Wular lake, Zaina Kadal on River Vitasta, ,Zaina geer, an area known for its greenery, Zainapora/ Zainakot situated in the proximity of Srinagar city, Zaina Bazar, a market area from zaina Kadal to Nayid Kadal and two canals, one constructed in Ashmuqaam, Known as Shah Kul and one in Sopore known as Zainageer canal and so on and so forth. All this shows the extent of interest that this king had in construction, creation and development of new sites in most technical manner. Composite culture of Kashmir can trace the golden period of its history during this very period. The king was responsible for bringing in sea changes in the life style of the people, especially, Hindus, to whom, he introduced the habit of two time meals and even invited them to

taste special varieties of meat preparations. They say, Kashmiri Hindus till then used to prepare one time meal only. They utilized fresh water for daily consumption, washed all kitchenware daily and would shun from taking stale/ preserved food items. This change that the king inducted in them brought the two communities closer to each other. Bud Shah also enriched the field of music by giving a fresh look to Kashmiri sofiyana Mousokey with the inclusion of some instruments borrowed from the west Asian countries. The permanent adoption of these instruments at the instance of visiting musicians from Iran in his Darbar and as a result of the interaction amongst great musicians of that time had an everlasting impact on Kashmiri Mousokey/ music. The inevitable feel of west Asian touch in Kashmiri music is quite visible even today. It would have been a great delight to have more of such details regarding the reign of this great king, but for the lack space and authentic inputs, narrator is bound to conclude the description of this glorious period, called golden age of Muslim rule in Kashmir History. The King died at the age of sixty nine, after ruling for nearly fifty one years.

Krishna is now ready with his briefings on parikrama around Hariparvat or Aadhi-Sathana. His coverage of the morning parikrama, usually referred to as Prabhat-pharie, would have been more lively and vivid, had there been no frequent interruptions, which makes it somewhat un-rhythmic and tiresome. But then the side details are so spontaneous and catchy that their description can hardly be avoided by a man of Krishna's nature. Meantime, he moves through Bachi Darwaza into a narrow lane with two offshoots one to the left taking devotees around the hillock (Shown in the picture below with stone wall called Kallie fortifying the area) and the other going straight to the abode of Sindoori coloured Lord Ganesha, the Sheilla depicting the formless form of the Lord, first to be worshipped amongst all deities. Prior to migration, Aadhi Deva's shilla used to be bathed in milk before applying the sindoor on it. (A paste of red lead in ghee)The Lord would be decorated with garlands/ flower petals, silver foils and a reddish brown/ bagwa coloured silken flag along with a pure silver metal crown, called chhether, mounted at the top. A coloured piece of cloth would also be spread on the upper top portion or Sheesha/ head of the Sheilla. The entire place around Vinayak would be illuminated with Deyas. It was followed by offering of milk, flower garlands and water, burning dupha, diyas and carving

yantra on sindoori surface using rice and flower petals amidst chanting of mantras. All this would give Lord Vinayaka Deva an enchanting look and consequently create a divinely atmosphere.The devotees would recite verses in praise of Lord Ganesha. In short, there would be a great religious fervor to witness.



Repaired part of Kallie near Baachi Barren

While the morning puja session would conclude for the first group, the puja would restart with the arrival of next group. The performance of samohic Aarti at dawn by the group of worshippers, who, usually, were the first to attend the pooja session, would be responsible to organize the Prabath-pharie. Krishna's grand father would join this group. The pharie would start in the form of a procession from Ganesh Sthal. They would usually move on the circular road along Kallie, chanting mantras, bajans and singing hymns in praise of Lord Siva, Lord Narayana, Lord Rama, Lord Krishna and Mother Goddess in all Her forms. They would stop at regular intervals, giving beckoning calls to the mother at various spots en-route, offered prayers and bowed in reverence. The first stop in front of a big Chinar tree on the nearby hilly slope had a circular stone base built around with a space in between its girth and the stone structure filled with sand, tiny pebbles and clay. People would throw grains of rice over this

concentric surface as feed for birds. Children, especially, students, while walking round this auspicious tree, stopped here before this emblem of Sidha peeth. They would pick up small pebbles or rice grains from the base and start counting them. Odd number was regarded as a good omen/ a sign of success in the exams or in any other venture. From here the pharie would move towards Sapth Rishi Sathana, the second stop. Some of the members of Prabhat pharie would prefer to ascend the small heights from here to reach a temple housing Sheilla of Maha Kali which had a sort of plateau like flat piece of land or ground in the front, serving as the prangans of the Kali Maa's temple. The place suited those worshippers, who preferred offering prayers/puja without usual fuss or who liked practicing yoga exercises. Most of the devotees would be seen at this spot, spending early morning hours in complete silence. From here one could move further up the hill to reach the gates of Hariparvat Kila, which is said to be the seat of Tripura Sundari/Ashta Dashbujee, the Goddess of all pervading beauty and the possessor of eighteen arms. Some say that the fort on the hill existed much earlier than the date it is supposed to have been built by the great Mughal King, Akbar Badshah, whose forces deceitfully took Yousuf Shah-i-chakh, the brave King of Kashmir and thus brought an end both to his reign as well as to his life. Habba Khatoon the greatest romantic poetess of Kashmir, beloved of Yousuf, is remembered even today for her touching songs that she composed and sang to immortalize her love that met an unfortunate and tragic end, leaving her completely shattered. Yousuf belonged to Shia sect of Kashmiri Muslims. He was reportedly a docile king, who had earned respect of the people in general for his amiable and loving character. He is supposed to have become a victim of inter-sectarian hatred. He is also remembered being responsible for building the Imam-bada at Zadibal. It is said that Habba-Khatoon, the beloved wife of Yousuf, as per her wish, was laid to rest by the side of her husband somewhere in Bihar orU.P.

So far as construction of fort /Hariparvat Kila by Mughal Emperor is concerned, it is hard to comment with certainty whether there was a fort structure in existence prior to Mughals, but it is for sure that the structures other than fort were existing at the hilltop, which gets authentication from the activities of Shams-ud-Din Araki, who desecrated and destroyed number of temple strucures not only on the foothills, .but on the hilltop including temple of Haaribrarie. After the seizure of the kingdom by Mughals, Emperor Akbar laid down a

new city around the pious hillock within Kallie called Nagar-Nagar and reportedly built a fort. The importance of the area, prior to and during his time can be guessed from the fact that it was probably the part sliced out of the city of Vicharnag and a part from the city of Srinagri. King Akbar gave a shahi look to the place, built two walls/ Kallies for fortifying and safeguarding the new city. The capital city laid down by King Ashok the Great, earlier was comparatively better as far as features of such cities ask for. He had named it, Srinagari, which was much larger than Nagar Nagar. It had its location at prunaadhisthana and areas around, lateron new city of Srinagri was established by Parvarsena slightly below old city which included almost entire city of Srinagar, even areas in close proximity of Hariparvat. Thus, the fact that place had great historical importance earlier as well, can not be denied. After Moghuls, the maintenance part of the fort and city is said to have suffered for quite sometime, especially, during Pathan rule. The fort was subsequently renovated by Dogra Maharajas, who foresaw the importance of the place, especially, for the native people. Chambers for the prayer for people of different faiths were provided by the first Dogra Maharaja besides already existing Temple of Ashtadushbuga-Trapursundri within the fort. Hindus used to visit the temple during Navratras, (Viz; nine days of both Ramnavmi and Mahanavmi festivals). It is said that Maharaja also installed idol of Mata Sarthal Devi brought by him from Kistiwar, in consequence of his dream one night. The Kila would remain open for the people to have darshans of Devi on various occasions. Till recently, Children from Srinagar had two main attractions in climbing and reaching the hill top, first that it gave them the chance to take away cannon balls most probably left behind by the Dogra army and second that from here they could get the feeling that they were on the top of the world. They also derived pleasure seeing the entire city of Srinagar before their eyes. This fort, though in a bad shape these days, is one of the three places with which city can be identify with, the other two being the Shankracharya temple mounted on a separate hill range and the Dal Lake, at the foot hills of Mount Maha Deva with Mughal gardens on its outskirts.

Krishna is back with the groups of people, those who opted ascending the fort temple and subsequently march down the rough hilly terrains and also those who after yoga and prayers in the prangan of Kali temple, would most often reach the lower gates of

Chakrishour temple at almost the same time. Meantime the main Prabat-pharie that followed the route running parallel to the dilapidated but still existing portions of Kaliie (Remains of Great stone wall), would also arrive but at outer Gates of Chkrishoura. The former groups would offer puja at the lower gate. At the foot of Chakreshuora Devasthana, there being two stairs for yatris to reach the upper gate of the temple shrine. One built recently and the other, the main one artistically raised with stone slabs set in sand and cement, having alternate broad steps followed by square platforms with zig zag stone lining or supportive walls on both the sides of the stairs, made up of carved and slightly bigger size stone slabs dully covering the upper surface of these side walls for the convenience of yatris, who take intermittent rest while ascending or descending the stairs. Some yatris would perform Aarti and meditated for a few minutes at the lower gates while some preferred ascending the stairs and performed puja infront of the shilla, which would give them the feel of having attained the blissful state. And at the outer gates, the main prabhat-pharie group, following the parikrama route, would stop near cluster of houses for prayers. *(Temple within the buildings, probably, called chakas, where the devotees would perform puja of the three Sheillas; Chakrishori Bhagwati, Tripura Sundari and Hari Bhagwati, but not before offering milk, flower petals and Ratandeeps to lord Shiva, whose beautiful lingam installed in each of these temples, would automatically invite the devotees to sit in front of Ling and offer prayers in cool and calm atmosphere. Puja would take place under the guidance of a Purohit).* These Chakas had a vast piece of land/a big ground forming the hinder side, called Devi Angan, where big religious congregations' and yagas would take place before the settlement of Tibetan refugees. The allotment of this piece of land for construction of permanent hutments for refugees, should not have taken place in view of the fact that such places needed to be kept out of human habitation, as it was amongst a few places, where one could breathe fresh air in abundance.



Chakrishour Temple Gate at the beginning of the stairs



An aerial view of down town city from Hariparvat fort



Chakrishour-Shilla/ Temple Hariparvat

After China invaded India in1961, on the pretext that India had given refugee to Dallai Lamma, the spiritual head of Tibetan Budhists, a sizeable portion of Tibetans population comprising of Buddhists as well as Muslims for fear of prosecution, migrated to India. While Buddhist preferred their transit camp in Himachal, Muslims shifted to Srinagar in Kashmir. They were first camped in buildings known as Botteh Saraies, previously built with the intention of providing rest houses to the people coming from Ladakh region. Since, the influx of these refugees went on increasing abnormally; the existing buildings became over crowded and quite in-sufficient to accommodate the incoming Tibetian refugees. Accordingly, three more buildings were erected in addition to the rest houses /Saraie at Eid-gah, Safa-Kadal, Batmallo and Karan-Nagar. During the course of time, all these buildings were found inadequate for the ever-increasing influx of the refugees and thus new colonies were planned and constructed by the Government for the welfare of these muslim Tibetans.



Forest patch on front side of Fort

A similar influx had taken place in late Nineteenth century or in the early twentieth century, when people of Ladakhi origin not as refugees but having expertise in moulding metal for making of guns, had arrived at the invitation of the state. Later on, they settled in the vicinity of Malkha, the biggest graveyard in Srinagar. This new settlement came to be known as the Bota Khar Mohalla or Bandook Khar Mohalla. The people of this locality are still known for their expertize in a particular craft, viz; in the moulding of iron metal into weaponry. They have since mingled with the local populace and are now part of the Kashmiri society. Similarly, the 1961 Tibetian refugees also proved very hardy, industrious and self supporting stuff. To begin with, they took to business of used garment for their living. Later on, they shifted to machine based embroidery caps, fur clothing and sweater knitting etc. Now, they are one of the flourishing communities in Kashmir. Some have managed matrimonial alliances with local Muslims and obviously might have acquired land purchasing rights as well. For some, Government has constructed flats, while well to do influential members have managed houses on rent. Thus, they have prospered and do enjoy security and safety. Amongst the number of housing colonies that have come up for these people, include two within Hariparvat premises itself and one in Devi Aangan. These people, physically strong, economically sound, religiously akin and politically important, have been willingly accepted as part of Kashmiri society; whereas this type of treatment is comparatively absent in the case of the Kashmiri- Punjabis, who

came to settle more than 150 years ago or for that matter of fact, the P.O.K refugees of 1947, in Jammu from Chambh, Poonch, Mir-pur etc. whose fate is still hanging in air.

Back to Devi Aangan, all the post migration Chakas, some temples or the old structures mentioned earlier, have either been razed to ground without leaving a trace or converted into residential houses. The path that the main Prabhat Pharie followed would split in two directions, one through yet another magnificant stone gate in the Kallie named Sangeen Darwaza, a close look at Sangeen Darwaza would reveal the great grandeur of Mughal Sultanate. It is.an entrance or exit to Devi-Aangan and the adjoining areas including Hawal in down town city, people, usually, follow this route through Darwaza, as a short-cut to Rainawari, Kashmir University and NIT Srinagar all in the close vicinity of great Shrine of Hazratbal. (Hazratbal, a shrine of greatest religious significance.to Muslims, Holy relics of Prophet Mohmmad P.B.U.H, has been preserved here, after some merchant brought it from Saudi Arabia. The Chief Priest of this zeyarat displays the holy relics to the devotees for having its deedar on various religious occasions. Pandits also hold this place of worship in great reverence, for they believe that prior to shifting of the holy relics in this Dargha Sharif, it had been a temple dedicated to lord Vishnu. It is situated on the banks of Negeen Lake, the hinder portion of Dal-Lake. With enchanting beauty that Nature displays here, Late Sheikh Mohmmad Abdullah devoted his time and energy in reconstructing the Zeyaratgha, giving it an entirely different look by erecting a most beautiful Marble tomb like structure over the Ibadatgha. The funds for the project were raised as a consequence of his personal efforts. The departed leader gave Kashmiri Muslims the symbol of Kashmiriat in the form of a religious monument).

Down the lane, one reaches Firdous cinema, presently a godown rented to Armed forces, at the end of path that touches Srinagar-Leh Road. There is a small lane across the Highway that leads one to the abode of Puran Raaz Bharava, at Saazgiripora in Hawal-Zadibal. This place is also famous for the City Immam Badha, having great religious significance for the Shia-community in the valley as quoted earlier.



Sangeen Darwaza at Hawal

During Mohorram the place attracts uninterrupted flow of thousands of Shia devotees. Krishna recalls that despite strict instructions from his parents, as a child, he hardly resisted himself from witnessing the yearly Aasura processions, where people exhibited their un-flinched faith in God and His messenger. Though, it is never an occasion to watch the Aasura procession as a spectator, but in by-gone-days people had faith and devotion irrespective of the religion, they belonged to and as such there was no restriction for children, who would hardly mind visiting even the Immambadas. Back to Prabhat Pharie as regards the other branch of main parikrama road, it formed the circular path around the hillock, with different stops for offering prayers to particular deities. The path would ultimately culminate at the gate near Sikh Gurdwara Chatti Pathchaie. Krishna intends to give detailed description of Prabhat Pharie from Chakrishour separately. Presently, he would like to extend his description of the places in the peripheries of Hariparvat.

Chapter III (Part B)

Peripheries of Hariparvat and Prabhat Pharie

Zadibal in the periphery of Hariparvat is a place of great historical importance. Dominance of Shia-sect in this part of the city has a history, which goes back to times of Amir Kabir Ali Shah Hamadani and Shamsud-din Araki. Dr. K.N.Pandita, professor and a Scholar of repute, in his translation of Persian text, *(Translated version* titled"A Muslim Missionary in Mediaeval Kashmir"), gives a biographical sketch of Shamas-ud-din Araki, who, eventually, played a crucial role in effecting conversion of most of the Kashmiris to Muslim faith. The text referred to here, contains informative account on socio-political environment during the period of Araki's stay in Kashmir. It brings out the fact that conversion can never be a voluntary act; though for the oppressed class, it can be a simple and safe means of avoiding ruthless suppression. At times, the subjugated lot have to yield before the oppressor out of fear of persecution or dreadful death.Whether conversion in Kashmir has taken place with the consent of non-believers or otherwise? Kubraviyyeh-Nurbakshihyey-Hamadaniyyeh link between Hazrat Mir Shamsud-Din Araki and his fore-runner Amir Kabir Sayyid Ali Hamadani is enough to understand the history of conversion of Non-believers to Islam. However, it is a fact that the mission conversion received the right flip from Zadibal area for quite justifiable reasons.

It is here that Shamsud-Din Araki started consolidating his position as a crusader. Musa Raina handed over the possession of Zadibal area to Mr. Araki in endowment, for the construction of Nurbakshiyyey hospice, which later-on served as tomb/ a shelter for the grave of this great missionary of Islam and probably, no longer existing now. Dr. Pandit, while working on his translation of the said Persian manscript/ text, discovers Mr. Araki, possibly of Kurdish ethnicity, associated with a Shia-Muslim missionary from Arak, a known place in Iran. He also draws Araki's links with the various Sufi orders, all with their establishment in Gilan, the northern provience of Iran, perhaps, the oldest group of Safavi order (Sufis) in

Qaracheh Dag, which was considered as the strong protagonists of the old Lahijani School of Sufis, Lahijans of Azerbaijan Kurdish stock.

Since, the critical analysis of the personality of Araki's calibre, asks for an approach based on impartial view point and un-biased inferences, which can be arrived at only after plausible thinking and sincere and thorough research work, of-course supported by solid facts that can withstand any scrutiny. Accordingly, it is necessary to study the personal traits of the man, as described by his biographer. The interpretation of excerpts chosen here are in no way aimed at demeaning Araki's methodology or challanging his philosophy of waging holy Jihad for setting up a better world order, but then rationale behind this thought process definitely required due deliberation. Obviously, such an approach meant use of force, a war against the infidels, hardly acceptable preposition in any civilized society. Wars never happen where people follow a path of their choice, peace cannot exist once wars are waged and wars are won only by force. To counter the illogical arguments of certain religious zeallots, who advocate the theory that conversion of Kashmiris to Islam has been a case of love at first sight, an act of willingness and not compulsion of any form? They argue that the converts had been driven to Islam out of their instaneous love for the religion and its prophet? This assertion needs review before drawing true and fair picture. The extracts from the said text reveal to an extent, the plot of the play. After all the people have the intellect to analyse the facts and frame their opinion. Mir Shamsuddin Araki, as per the text, displayed controversial dispositions at different stages of his stay in Kashmir. While acknowledging the fact that he was responsible for successful launch of an organized Jihad for en-mass conversion of majority of Kashmiris to Islam, it necessitates close analysis on whether his role in the process of transformation had been that of a guide or a law enforcing agency. It is worthy to note that his visit to Kashmir was initially supposed to have been undertaken at the instance of Mirza Bayaqara (AD1470-1505), the Timurid ruler of Herat, for whom he was to procure medicinal herbs for treatment of his ailment. As such, he had the right to introduce himself to the then Sultan of Kashmir, as an accredited emissary of the ruler of Herat. But then he opted for a shift in his statement from being a procurer of medicinal herbs for ailing ruler-patron to that of a zealous follower of Nurbakshiyyeh order or sect, whose solid motive was to propogate

Islam among local non-muslims. Concealment of his extra-territorial religious commitment, (His explicit mission) can hardly give credit to his initial criticism of the Sultan of Kashmir, who according to him lacked courtesy in expressing his gratitude to the visitor of his status, (An imperial emissary, assigned the job of procuring herbs for his king), which was at variance with his later claim that he bore no obligations towards the ruler of his native country and openly declared that it was of his own will that he undertook the journey to Kashmir and that he was in no way bound to obey and oblige the ruler of his country. An important thing to note here is the exposure of his intent behind his first visit to Kashmir, which had two distinct aspects, one that after his arrival, he would lay low for some time and continue to resort to the act of concealing the truth/ the option of dissimulation, till situation was conducive and second that he would not disclose his hidden agenda of propogating his faith amongst non-believers, atleast, till the approach of the right moment. Original biographer in simple words clarifies that Mr. Araki had come to fight Jihad in Kashmir and in the process he left no option for infidels. They had either to accept the faith or face death. He being instrumental in enforcing mass conversion of Kashmiris to Islam finds better explanation in the following paragraphs.' *As an adherent follower of Kubraviyyeh-Hamadaniyyeh Sufi order, he had the advantage of being acceptable to large sections of local Muslim fraternity. Further, he had made a thorough study of the social contours of Kashmiri society and had finally come to the conclusion that the converted community of Muslims in Kashmir was struggling for its identity and social ethos. He believed that the seed sown by Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani and his son Mir Mohammad Hamdani, almost a century and a half ago, had not sprouted well. His objective assessment of partial success of Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani's mission from A.D1371 to1381, made him to infer that prospect of reviving the struggle of establishing the faith with renewed zeal along new lines would not be a forbidden task. Araki was correct in his assessment of hoplessly weak and fragmented central authority in the Kingdom of Kashmir. He had come to know that the Sultan had a nominal authority, while power and influence rested with autonomous regional commanders and feudal chiefs / Zamindars, who indulged in mutual rivalry, had lust for power and were, thus, engaged in court conspiracies, betrayals and deceits, which had become the order of the day. Obviously, a well learned traveller of Araki's caliber had no*

problem in setting himself for the task of creating adequate logistics by roping in some of the powerful Kashmiri Commanders and Landlords. In the interests of his mission, he almost ignored the Sultan and rightly so. He showed his audacity, when he criticized the ruler of Kashmir for his failure in observing established norms of protocol for he expected the ruler to rise to his feet and touch the letter received from the ruler of a friendly neighbouring country with his forehead, for it had been offered to him in a golden platter. Araki had also expressed his displeasure at the behivour of the courtiers of the Sultan of Kashmir, blaming them of having no etiquette. Thus, the observation that he delibratedly left sight of his criticism and the u-turn he made, while posing a missionary instead of an accredited emissary usually bound by the obligations of the rule, is perfectly appropriate, for he himself had exposed his level of hypocrisy.

Question arises, whether after the final departure of Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani from Kashmir in A.D 1384, there had been any interactions between the caretakers of Hamadani mission in Khurasan and its hangers on in Kashmir. The fact that Nurbakshiyyeh and Hamdaniyyeh order was regarded ideologically complimentary with their operation from almost the same geographical region, but whether there is indication of any connection between Sayyid Shamsuddin Araki and earlier converts to Islam in Kashmir, who owed allegiance to Hamadani mission, is hardly clear." How did Kashmir royality and their nobility so easily succumb to the intimidation of Araki and his band of followers in the matter of faith? What were the compulsions for them to give Araki more importance than he deserved as a missionary? Should the impressions of Mirza Haider Dughlat' author of Tarikh-i-Rasbidi', be accepted, when he considers Araki a pretender and a hypocrite having misled the people of Kashmir along a wrong path by inducing them to move away from the true faith? Why the biographer has left out details that led to the death of Araki? All these queries need detailed deliberations", says the translater. After the death of Sultan Zainu'l-Abidin, valley had witnessed social and political upheavels. Court conspiracies, warring and rebellious Damra Chiefs, defiant commanders and landlords, rivalry between locals and outsiders for political power and above all polarization of society along sectarian divide, had contributed in making Araki's task easier. On his arrival

in the valley in A.D 1486, Araki roped in contemporary Damra commanders, Musa Raina, the foremost among them. During earlier stages of Araki's stay in the valley, he had observed that the Kashmiri Muslims had remained dismally bogged for nearly one hundred and fifty years after the start of the mission of Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani.With a strong pre-Islamic nostalgic nausea, Muslim society was still struggling to adopt and reconcile fully to new social and political order of foreign origin. This was the reason that missionaries coming from Turan, Khurasan, Iran, Iraq or Arab, were given highest regard and their word on Quran was taken as final rather than accepting the theo-philosophical views of local Mullahs. Kashmiri converts wavered with regard to following of new and old customs. Shamsud-Din Araki quite ably understood the social turmoil with its political implications and accordingly tailored the situation that could provide face to the expected transformation, a change which could break the idealogical barriers that had isolated converts in valley from rest of the Muslims in neighbouring countries. Finding the ground fertile, he unfolded his vast religious mission by down playing his role as a royal emissary from Herat and concentrated more on his Nurbakshiyyeh doctrine, converting more and more followers to this fold from co-religionists. He started telling people that he was seeking blessings of his forerunner Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani and claimed that he was to carry forward successfully the Hamadaniyyeh mission in Kashmir. He did succeed but main reason for his success was a deep rooted rivalry between Sunni Baihaqi Sayyids and Kashmiri Nobles or commanders of indigenous origin. Their struggle was for political power and ascendancy, not for faith. Indigenous group to some extent were more tolerant. Further, the Sayyids did not welcome the presence of Araki, much less his propagation of Shia Nurbakhshiyyeh order. Araki pinned his hope on befriending and winning over to his side some of the powerful indigenous commanders and nobles, particularly, those who contested power with Sayyids with the support of influential official circles. The Araki's alliance was not favourable towards Baihaqi Sayyids, who lavishly provided free meals and gifts to ordinary people.

Araki had resolved to demonstrate the operative part of his great mission, which he thought could be brought about by destroying all symbols of Hindu civilization and enforce extremist spirit for effecting large scale conversion of the community of infidels and polytheists to new faith. However, he felt that

the fresh converts needed a divine ordination of his mission. Reacting to the report brought to him about persistence of Hindu CUSTOMS AND the routine way of life that converts lived with even after ONE and a half century of their acceptance of the FAITH; he proclaimed that his purpose of visiting Kashmir was to pull down the idol houses of infidels and polytheists. Therefore, his first task in this direction was to put an end to the innovations, traditions and customs of infidels. A stunning description of how Araki and his followers, whom he called Sufis and Darvishes after the fashion of Safavi/Sufi, order of Iran, destroyed scores of temples, raised mosques on the ruins and forced conversion on Hindus of Kashmir. Historians, including one who authored Baharistan-i-Sahahi, in Persian language have not concealed their sectarian prejudice against Araki.

Krishna opts for further material content from referred text for better understanding of the subject. Four well known Sufi orders, originating from Iran, had spread to other Islamic countries, before Arak's arrival in Kashmir. Strange enough that the Shia-Sufi Nurbakhshiyyeh order introduced to Kashmiri Muslims by Araki in the middle of sixteenth century also saw its end with his departure, though some of its followers can be found in Gilgit and Baltistan even today. Now, Sufism from Iran brings to mind two out of the four catagories of Sufis, one whose mystical approach grounded in Islamic faith with no scope for any one to come in conflict with the order, while the other usually referred to as transcendentalists, who seek to rise above the compulsions of orthodoxy, obviously, its members have suffered persecution from the orthodoxy from time to time. This sect had similarity of approach with Rishism that existed in Kashmir and other parts of India, thus the philosophy held by this group did find a suitable space and the followers called it Kashmiri Sufism, but it did not receive any royal patronage.

Tussle between Sunni-Hanafi faith and Sia-sect in fifteenith and sixteenith century Iran culminated into the emergence of safavis, while patronage enjoyed by Sunni-Hanafi ended and the followers of Ali's line finally presided over Iranian state. Probably, Kashmiris converted to Nurbakhshiyeeh faith lacked knowledge of Araki's background, his ideology and the contours of society and culture he belonged to. In this context, it becomes necessary to understand his mindset while studying the operative parts of his mission in Kashmir.

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Mulla Ismail, a rich and prosperous man of the valley, happened to come in contact with Araki and became a devoted momineen. He demonstrated his large heartedness by placing all his wealth and belongings at the disposal of Araki. While showering praises at Araki, he told him that he first came out of the skin of his grandfather, meaning that he converted from his faith and then he had to come out of his own skin once he adopted Nurbakhshiyyeh faith. He declared that he was thus withdrawing his hand from his wealth and belongings for the sake of new faith. However, the reasons ascribed later on for falling from the eyes / favours of Araki, can hardly convince even an ordinary mind. It simply creates doubt about the credentials of Araki as an honest and genuine crusader.

Again, the first amongst the nobles and the rulers of the land of Kashmir to win special favours of Araki was Damra chief, Malik Musa Raina. It was due to the continued efforts of this man of tremendous courage that worthy momeens lifted the banner of Islam, for the religion of Mustafa and the system of Ali Murtaza to reach the peak of glory.

Shamsuddin Araki first visited the place of Zadibal in A.H. 888/ A.D 1482. He liked the place. Malik Musa Raina donated all his land in Zadibal included the old houses to Araki, renouncing his claim of the entire estate and also urging his family members one and all, including his servants and peasants to offer all their possessions to Araki as gifts. But, why Araki accepted these gifts and what for? Being a missionary, he was supposed to propogate the Nurbakhshiyyeh faith and not to amass wealth. Later happenings speak a lot about the character of the missionary called Shams-ud-din Araki and the end result of his actions. After forty two years, during the reign of Mirza Haider Gorkan, when domination of Turks had almost ended, Mirza Haider demonstrated deep animosity for Araki, destroying the ground that he (Araki) had gained.

There can be no two opinions regarding the fact that Araki did inflict severe blow to pre-Islamic religion, when he destroyed hundreds of idol houses with or without resistance and subsequently built mosques and Khanqahs on the ruins. Araki had begun his endeavor of destroying temples from Hariparvat hillock, where a big idol of Hareh Brari lay housed in the temple and people circumambulated it. These people followed the practice of idol

worshipping and were sometimes joined even by the then Sultan, his officials and the nobles in their prayers. Amir Shams-ud-din Araki, one day in the spring season of a particular year, was staying in the house of Mulla Ismail. It so happened that a loud sound of drums and other musical instruments was heard which ached his ears. It was followed by the deafening noise of cheering people, which disturbed him beyond measure. Upon coming to know that the infidels had gathered in the neighbourhood to celebrate some festival. He stood up saying that he was nowhere near his purpose. His visit to the place was to pull down all the idol houses and to put an end to the customs and traditions of kafirs (Non-believers). Obviously, it would not happen by sitting peacefully. Araki, therefore, rushed to the spot along with his band of followers. He neither cared for the reaction of the people nor had any fear of law-enforcing authorities. He forced the infidels to run away, dismantled the foundation of the temple and set the entire structure on fire. Araki had gathered so much of strengh by then that he acted against the wishes of the ruler, who himself a Muslim, had been attending this festivity.

According to Araki, Candle showing the path of Mustafa was lighted with the show of power at Hariparvat. From here he initiated the task of destroying temples at all other places. Araki issued instructions that the land on which the temple of Haari Brarie stood be levelled so that Ibadatgah could be constructed at that place. Between Hariparvat and Zadibal there stood two more temples. Araki and his group destroyed both of these temples and carried the stones from site for the construction of boundary walls at Zadibal hospice lateron. Next temple that he destroyed was that of Chamkundi; a big mosque was raised at the spot out of the temple ruins. Araki now proceeded to Kamraaz pargana. A temple named Mahasen temple, a Hindu pilgrimage, was razed to ground here. He broke the idol and set the temple structure on fire. He engaged himself in felling the trees that surrounded the temple structure. A Jami mosque was built in its place. A big temple at Baramulla in Kamraaz Pargana called Warbalaru was also destroyed by him and a mosque erected over the ruins. Again, Nandraje temple, usually referred to Nandraza (Bharava) in a village of Shivaz in same pargana of Kashmir, was destroyed and a Jami'a mosque built there. From here, he set his men to Chogul again in Kamaraaz pargana, where a massive temple called Bomar existed; a neo-convert Suhabhatta was dispatched by

Araki with the soliders, so called dervishes via Sopore. Somehow people of Bomar got the wind. Since they belonged to a martial race; they decided to give him a tough fight. There was powerful man called Haldar in the area. People prompted him to take appropriate action. Nallah Pahru was set as the dividing line for defending the massive temple. But after stiff battle of two days, the villagers withdrew and the temple was pulled down and foundation made plain for erecting a mosque in its place. Suhabhatta also destroyed temples of Uttarasher, Badakot/ Baderkot, Kubisher and Gushi situated in the localities of Kandi, Shaki Shiraz, Kupwara and Drang respectively. Mosques were built at these temple sites. It was followed by destruction of temples of Jatti, Kandi Renu and Bachhi Renu, also in Kamaraja region. Satwal temple in Sopor was also destroyed by him. Obviously, the picture is clear regarding the procedure adopted by Araki for ensuring conversion so willingly.

Meanwhile, an amazing incident that happened near the Hospice built at Zadibal by Araki, is worth mentioning. Araki wanted to destroy a big temple of Paneh Renu with a spring by its right side and fir and other varieties of shaddy trees surrounding it, but a man named Khwaja Gharami, who lived in the close vicinity of the temple, objected to this plan. Since, Khawaja was highly influential, he enjoyed respect and regard of the people in the locality. Therefore, all of them objected and even came out to obstruct the destruction of the temple. Despite objections, Araki still nurtured the desire of destroying it. The fortune of achieving this goal fell much later into the hands of Shaykh Daniyal at a time when it had the proper permission of Malik Musa Raina, who had in turn sought orders from Hazrat Baba. After accomplishing this task as a true follower, Araki once again, prepared his supporters telling them that it was incumbent upon the believers to destroy another big temple that existed close to the grave yards of Sayyids and Shaykh Bahauddin. The temple was called Bomesh Swami. A learned ascetic called Makhdum Maulana Usman Majzoob, well known for his miracles, was respected by people from all walks of life. His house was situated near Hamadanniyyeh Khanqab in Srinagar. He would usually go to Nowshehra to meet Sultan. Accordingly, he had to pass by the side of Hariparvat. At Bimeh/ Bomesh Swami (Bhimaswavamin) temple, he would get down from his horse and bow his head while facing the temple, which obviously meant that he had regards for the idol house in the temple. He would walk some distance on foot and only when

the temple was out of sight that he would mount the horse again. When asked by Shams Ganai, a close associate of Araki, the secret behind the act. He replied that it was to please Satan with enormous power and that he would have to continue this act of bowing before the temple till some one more powerful comes and defeats it. Now, who was more powerful Makhdum Mulana or Araki, the man who destroyed the temple? Initially, it must have been a riddle for the people to understand such a statement from a learned ascetic, but somehow the message between the lines is there for sane people to read clearly. Araki had organized a brigade of dervishes with instructions to move into all villages and localities for destroying and removing even the left traces of the temples. He would personally supervise the destruction of temples and stoppage of the observance of pre-Islamic religious customs or rites in the peripheries of Srinagar and elsewhere. However, he had to fight decisive battles at a place called Zaldagar, where he managed to save his life with difficulty. Araki destroyed Bakhi Renu temple at the low lying area of the city, another temple in its neighbourhood called Udran was pulled down and destroyed. When the infidels came to known about it, they gathered with arms to fight the group of Sufis led by Araki. The Sufis thus got engaged in the battle with infidels for several days. In this great Jihad, infidels received reinforcement, which forced dervishes to withdraw towards a place wherefrom they could re-assemble, reach Zaldagar and protect Araki. But infidels proved a better stuff and Suffis received wounds and had to run away towards city. Araki was taken to the house of one Abdal Magray, husband of Malik Musa Raina's daughter. When Malik Musa came to know about the incident, he sent his son Malik Ali Raina to disperse the infidels. Araki did not stay in Abdal's house for a long; he wanted his followers either to ensure the immediate demolition of the temple or otherwise see him off to Irak. Araki himself participated in the demolishing work, after Ali Raina defeated the infidels. Henceforth, Araki took an active part in demolishing temples in person. He destroyed the Kol-Blareh/ Mankeh Renu temple that stood on an island and subsequently a mosque came up on the temple foundation. A big temple on north side adjacent to Idgah called Janak Renu, presently known as Kalanveth was destroyed and a mosque built at the place. In Rainawari, besides many big temples, a well known temple of Vetal Mandir, where Jogis from all over India would assemble in large numbers, was destroyed by Araki. Another temple at Tashwan,

near Fateh Kadal was razed to ground and material from the site shifted to and later on used in building the hospice at Zadibal. Kazi Chak, who was given a plot of land by Araki at Tashwan, ascended the thrown of Kashmir later on. Araki was still to destroy yet another temple that stood on the Island/part of Dal. It was called Udernatau. A mosque came up at the place. A temple by the name of Sadasmolo stood close to the place called Bazaar-e-Misgaran; Sadas-Molo temple was also demolished at the instance of Araki. Like-wise, a temple at Sudrebal near Nowshehra called Modrenu was also demolished

Man by nature prefers to stick to his own faith, even when he may not recognize the real essence behind it. Only insanes surrender willingly to the dictates of religious hot heads. Unless, of-course, there are reasons for accepting defeat, preposition regarding conversion just for ensuring a seat in Jannat, can hardly attract a man of reason. Economics and threat perceptions play a crucial role in religious conversions. Thus, what Araki did, should be an eye opener for those, who propound the theory that Kashmiris had voluntarily accepted conversion. People could afford to be unreasonable in the past, but irrational approach in present day life is bound to be rebutted. Such an approach has little scope to score over others.

Certain people do take pleasure in distorting the facts. They try to destroy all that does not seemingly concern them or does not belong to their thought perception. Knowingly or unknowingly they are adamant in depriving the present and future generations of something that the people in general might otherwise feel proud of. For such biased people anything beyond their comprehension is nonsense. What they believe is true and what others believe in is completely irrational and profanity. No wonder then that the subject called mythology is complementary to falsehood for such people. They throw arguments that it is something carved out of pure fantasy and bears absolutely no near relation with truth. But, whether these people agree or not, most of the topics in mythology/myth from all angles are akin to history, a concrete representation of facts of bygone days, described in an unconventional and uncommon language, too difficult to comprehend and too complicated to be understood by an average mind, especially those who have remained cut off from their roots for obvious reasons. But then they need to understand that the only difference between history and mythology lies in the fact that

history is methodically recorded composition of events, whether real, fabricated, biased or otherwise. Thought perceptions of the writers/ historians have more often influenced documented history, mythology may not be so simple or rationale for an expert to explain facts in a communicable language that too with no readily available proof to substantiate the details as would otherwise be thought of in actual practice.

The deliberations on the events of distant past / pre-historic times often confuse the mind. Understandably, it is a complex preposition, very difficult to visualize and grasp. The solutions to the riddles, associated with such topics, are difficult for the simple reason that there is a lack of special skill and practical approach in exploring this field of study. Contrary to this, history is more often made to present as the only true and real version of the occurrence. Even though people, who have come across certain events during their life time and have actually lived through these events, are simply made to believe or sometimes forced to rely on the descriptions that do not go down their throat well, but that it suits the majority thinking and so the truth takes the back seat. So far as transformation or reformation of the mythological details into an authentic document, with descriptions of events or happenings of very distant past and their presentation in a logical form is concerned, it is quite practicable, provided application of reason and judgment is there and the details that have come down to us from the time immemorial, are scientifically fed in to a convincing system of communication. All this has to be understood and retrieved with diligent application of mind. The signs, the marks or the remains have to be deciphered in relation to study changes that have taken place during the course of evolution. Sometimes, it may happen that non-sequential order is put forth by way of wrong interpretation of facts or at times the occurrences may get wrapped up in fantasies either by chance or for any definite reason, this has to be sorted out and discrepancies crept in, whatever and wherever, have to be removed. As pointed out and as a matter of fact, the written history too is never free from distortions or biased views. The recorded events are more often a partial reflection of the absolute truth. But then historians have their limitations, because of the obvious impediments, which hinder their judgment, as eyes hardly behold the truth in its entirety. Such weaknesses are difficult to over-come more so when one has mostly to rely on secondary and tertiary sources of study material. Mythology

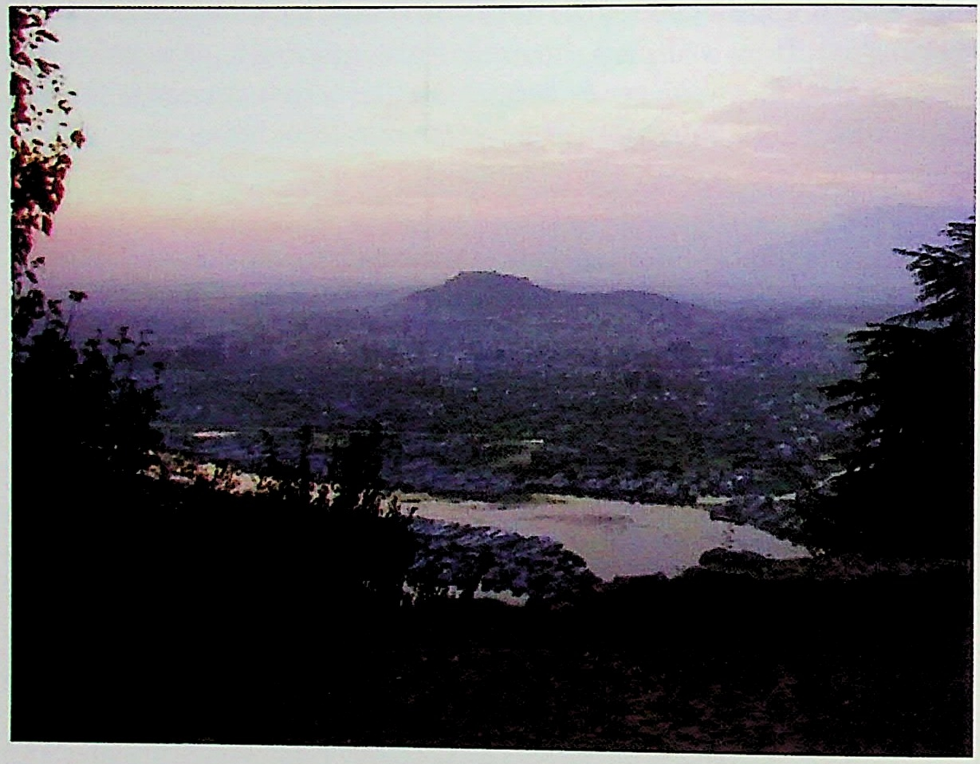
being still intricate in nature, offers a greater challenge to the decipherer. He has to conceive something that is beyond the comprehension of others, especially when there is very little commonality between pre-historical past and the current events. Just think of a wireless or telecommunication system in early nineteenth century, it would have appeared something magical, but it is a reality now and would be a history tomorrow and probably a matter of no consequence in some distant future. Thus, it is difficult to set the parameters that would justify the truth behind events, even when the recorded references do mostly exist that can testify and connect the outcome with so called mythology or myth. No honest man can ever claim to be perfect or impartial in his description, for most of the time, he fails to de-code such secrets that are clearly visible or for which even keys to the treasure lie with him. At times, he may go probing things successfully that are beyond the comprehension of commonly conceived perceptions. More often, the activities that look apparently fabricated and may even present an obscure picture that easily delude the mind, yet in the end may turn out to be real. While, on the other hand, the results so normal to reasoning may but prove otherwise. There is, of-course, scope for distinguishing between truth and falsehood, provided people have patience to probe, positive outlook and of-course, longing for understanding the complexities.

The concept of Das Avtar, incarnations of Lord Vishnu, or taking birth by the Lord in different ages, may appear a myth to some, but for others, particularly, the men of scientific temperament, who often dive deep to peep into the world of mystery that leads to facts like the origin of species (viz', creation & development of organisms on this planet from single cell-unit to multi-cellular organisms), would automatically understand the truth behind the beliefs that are more conclusive than the theory itself. Again, the depiction of Lord Ganesha with elephantine head, plumb body, riding a rat, eyes small, long nose and ears as wide as fan, are to be understood by critics as the attribute attached to His personality and not the reflection of His physical form that most people are made to believe or think of the figure of Lord Ganesha. However, certain people are taught to tame prejudice from the day, they start fluttering their wings. It is futile to expect them to reach out at an agreement with the views other than their own. It should hardly surprise, if such people refuse to accept even the legitimacy of the acknowledged truths. They prefer

to be in a state of stagnation. Their upbringing is such that it prevents them from beholding any reason in what others believe. They take refuge in rare inadequacies that sometimes creep in the description and often try to link up these discrepancies to concocted tales, out of bias or sheer ignorance. Major religions of the world or for that matter of fact great civilizations have existed, just because of their dynamic nature so should Individuals accept the changes. Lord Krishna says that even if a man poses to be at rest and may assume his body to be motionless, he is still in a dynamic state, mentally, physically and biologically. The universally accepted truth is that change is the law of life and only non-existence can stop man from being dynamic.

People from ages have shown constant craving for unfolding the hither to unknown truths. Men of letters, great sages and philosophers have engaged themselves in studying the phenomena of Nature around them. The knowledge gathered from day today observations, sharp reasoning and rare experiences, thus, became the basis for the evolution of a definite thought process. With the passage of time, an urgency to compile the accumulated material in an organized manner must have been felt as the need of the hour. With the invention of scripts and development of writing skills, the verbal communication was slowly replaced by written notes. The experiences and findings began to be recorded in the form of manscripts and books. This gave birth to literature and history. Now many a times, certain observations seem to dictate the normal reasoning, but to write these observations off, without a proper scrutiny, is hardly justifying. False and fabricated stories can influence man's thinking but for a limited time. Inquisitive quality in a man never allows him to accept what does not fit into his reason well. Therefore, advocating only the ideas that suit one's thinking or belief, while becoming intolerant, when it comes to the understanding and appreciating of the rationale explanation on crucial or even controversial topics put forth by others, can not be an acceptable preposition for a new generation and that such an approach can never benefit the propagator. People have the sense to choose between things that are worth assimilation and those that need to be coughed out as irritants. No-body has the right to prescribe or enforce a framed opinion upon others so as to have control over their thought process. Interpretation as well as analysis is important in arriving at and framing of an impartial viewpoint. It surely involves positive out

look. At times, ignorance and intolerance dominates the reason and one may presume one's conclusions to be right, but it never confers upon anyone the right to negate what he does not want to believe or for which he is simply not ready to unlock his nervous system for acknowledging the other side of the truth. Prudence lies in finding the truth in the turbulent flow and not in filthy stagnation. Meanwhile, Krishna is back to Devi Aangan to resume commentary



Aerial view of Dal Jheel from Shankaracharya temple

on Parikrama of devotees in Prabhat :Pharie which stood at the gates of Chakrishour. He wanted a fresh impetus to modulate his voice for he recalled that prior to 1990, it was usual for devotees to offer prayers at various Shiellas, the abodes of deities and the temples located around the holy hillock along the Parikrima route, in particular, the region extending from Bacchi Barren to Sangeen Darwaza and from there to Kathi Darwaza. They would offer prayers to Jwala Bhagwati, Ashtadajbuja, Tripura Sundari, Mahakali, Sharika, Hari, Chandika and Sidha Lakshmi. They would also perform arthies at the temples of Lord Siva, Kamdev, Lord Ramchanderji/ Lakshmi Narayanji, Lord Krishna, Hanumanji and lastly at Pukherbal, on the shores of Dal-Lake, they would get absorbed in offering worship to the deity of

holy spring, Durga Bhagwati residing within sanctum of pukherbal temple, where one could bathe in Surya Kund (spring). Offering puja here blesses the devotee with peace and tranquility.

Revisiting the scenes of (Samohic puja)/ collective prayers offered to Lord Ganesha at Ganesh temple, Krishna says that there would be the largest gathering of devotees, who would lateron take different routes for performing puja of their dieties at their respective abodes, before reassembling at Chakrishour. They would ascend the cliffs for applying paste of sindoor mixed in ghee over the sheillas and decorated these with flower petals, sarees, buntings and silver foils. Majority of devotees would move on the circular path along foothills, reciting shaloks/ hymns in praise of their respective dieties. They would halt at Sidhapeeth. Some opted easy but long routes, some short cuts, but it was ensured that they meet at Chakrishour upper or lower gates at one and the same time. Most of them would offer prayer to Goddesses Sharika, Haari Brareh and SidhaLakshmi in temples/ Chakas at the foothills along roadside. At present, there is no trace of some of the temples and the structures seen. Devotees participating in prabhat pharie would almost be in communion with the dieties because of their un-flinched faith. They would frequently give beckoning calls to mother Goddess at the top of their voice, saying, "Maaj Harie Kar Paanehn yari" and "Harie kass/ Kasshum gum khari" which meant, "Oh! Mother Hari, do bless the people and save them from misfortunes". Except for the Chakri-Shouri shrine, a partially damaged Ramkoulun Mandir and Durga Devi Mandir at Pohkerbal, all other places of worship around Hariparvat, have been demolished or destroyed. Further, wild growth of grass, plants and trees together with the illegal construction of residential houses on the ascends of holy hill, makes it difficult for the devotees even to locate and reach the abodes of Jwala Devi, Kali Bhagwati, Chandika Devi, Hari Bhagwati and Sidha-Lakshmi at present. The Shiva temples along with the Dharmshallas, on roadside at northern edge/ Vamdev's turn just, before the stone steps/ stairs leading to Sidha Lakshmi's Shilla are nowhere seen these days. Goddess Sidha Lakshmi, (the giver of success/Siddhi and fortune) was worshipped for bestowing prospects of better life. Devotees would address Bhagwati with following words, "Sidha-Lakshmi Kar panun sadhat teh madhad- Dhe *Siddhi tehhe budhi"; implying, "May the Goddess Sidha Lakshmi help the* devotees and bless them with and wisdom and success". In the recent past, (Some time before 1990) stairs to

ascend the abode of Goddess Sidha Lakshmi were constructed on the hilly slope, just infront of the temple of Ram Koulun. So far as Ram temple is concerned, it initially housed the beautiful idols of Lakshmi and Narayana, Rama and sita and Radha and Krishna. After these idols were stolen from the temple, the statues of Lord Rama, Devi Sita, Lakshmana and Hunuman were installed within the sanctum santoria. The temple was set on fire and is partly damaged.It was here that huge gathering of devotees for offering prayers of the Lord and His consort, would take place. Devotees would prefer staying for a while within the temple premises. Verandah (called Dab in Kashmiri), semi-circular in orientation, almost circumscribing the temple, with a gap left in between the temple and the Dab that served as a path for parikrama, was the most sought after place for both enjoying Nature and worshipping as well. Towards its northern edge, there was the sloppy ground of Waris Khanun chahh, it had a wall that supported temple base on one side; while, a stone raised embankment on other sides. The compound including the temple structure was spread over a piece of land, owned by the management. With Dal Lake at stones throw, a peep through the window of Dab would present one of the most picturesque sights of Mother Nature. The scenic beauty in early morning hours, especially, during spring season, would be so enchanting, that one could hardly resist the temptation of stopping over here and meditating on Shiva's snowy cliff situated on Mount Maha Deva straight in the front and the Lingum shaped Shankaracharya temple on to its right. A cool breeze from heart stealing Dal Lake would refresh the mind and rid the entire body of all weariness. More often ground in immediate neighbourhood below would invite young and old to slip and slide down the grassy slopes. People ran down these slopes to have fun and entertainment, but at times they would also do it for the sake of tasting almonds in the temple garden.It would be worth mentioning here that after independence, the chief Minister, the then prime Minister of the State would organiz functions called Jashi-n- Kashmir on the patch of the land called Waris Kanun Bagh, famous for Chahh/ a pit (A well like structure within the ground). Usually such functions would be held either in spring or summer seasons, where the artists of great repute, would be invited for Musical concerts, particularly, those who were well versed in sofiyana mosukhi, Kashmiri folk dance, (Bandh pather) and Musiharas. The other specialties of these Naya Kashmir festivals included Kongchia and wazwana.

Krishna also recollects the yagnas that were performed almost on regular basis in Ram Koulun Mandir (temple). The reminiscence of one such function is quite fresh in his mind. A Sadhu from a distant place had come to Srinagar. He had planned to perform Navratra Puja in the temple. People from far off places in the valley were invited. Locals also turned up in large numbers for participating in such a great religious congregation. The yagna was to last for nine days of Navratras. On one particular evening, Krishna, as a child of seven or eight year's age, in the company of his cousins, set out from his home for attending the Yagna festivity. The function had already entered its third day. All including, children were asked to stay till conclusion of yaga and subsequent distribution of Prasada. It was somewhat late in the evening when Krishna and his brothers started leaving for their home. Since, they had to pass through Malkha, the biggest grave yard in the city, the element of fear from within started troubling them. Yet all of them posed quite bold and brave. Soon, they had a sigh of relief, when one old gentle man with turban on his head was sighted following the same path. During those days this area used to be totally isolated at night. People hardly passed through this route after sun set for fear of being robbed or for superstitious beliefs attached with all burial places. The old man was by now at pace with them. Using some communicable signs, he wanted the boys to tell him as to why they had been so late and if they lived in the neighbourhood of the place. The boys soon provided the old man with the necessary bio-data. He seemed to offer them his company, untill they reach their destination. The party continued to walk till midnight, but without reaching anywhere near their destination. They kept on asking the old man why their route had become so lengthy. The old man walked on and on without responding to the quarries. After rambling for hours together, they at last reached a crossing, where the street lights were still on. Things started becoming clear. They felt the immediate urge for urination and therefore stopped for a while for easing themselves. They were about to make up their mind to stop following the old man any more, when they suddenly discovered that the old man was nowhere to be seen. It must have been quarter to two, when the boys reached their home. The family members, who were so anxiously waiting for their safe return, felt quite relieved.

While sharing the vivid details of childhood reminiscences, Krishna does not want to lose contact with the groups of devotees

moving along all the opted parikrama routes. Since, he had moved ahead of certain groups, the part of the Prabhat Pharie would even go past his view. But instead of re-treating, he would wait for the remaining groups to arrive and in the mean time continue with pre-recorded description of all those routes that various group were expected to pass through after puja at Chakrishour.. He would begin with the group that had a routine of going up the stairs for offering pooja before Nirakar-roopyee sheilla, where Chakrishouri is condensed with Chakrishoura in Bindoo. People say that Sri-Chakra is visible at times even to an ordinary eye, an experience which can hardly be put in words. One of the greatest tantric painters of recent times, Late Ghulam Rasool Santosh, while addressing a group of devotees in one of the religious congregations at the Asthapana, said that every stone / a pebble or even a particle of this holy hill for him was pious and that all its shiellas and even stone pieces bore depiction of yantra, symbols, representing different Gods and Goddesses. These numberless naturally occurring micro and macro carvings with Bindoo in Sri-Chakra as their common base/ origin, should in no case be disturbed, he had repeatedly pleaded. This gentleman, in-fact, appealed to all sections of the society, including Government agencies, to exercise maximum restrain, ensuring that no further damage to the ecology of the place takes place, which ought to have received due attention. It may be mentioned here that even at the time of constructing temple over the Sharika Devi's Shilla, people not only opposed the construction of temple (spire/ tomb); they even resisted any change in shape or size of the Shiella. However, after due deliberations the temple like structure was raised under the supervisions of the then most competent technical experts, not below the ranks of chief Engineers, who made all efforts to maintain and preserve the sanctity of the place. The Asthapana known to worshippers as Adhi Sidhapeeth/ Pradhman peetha or chakrishour was the most frequently visited religious places in Kashmir.The devotees in general would make offerings (in the form of charvan and thhar) called chooth. After usual performance of pooja, a plate full of cooked turmeric rice and fried liver along with uncooked and freshly sliced lungs of a goat or sheep would be offered as a feed to high soaring eagles. These creatures would dive from heights to catch the flying pieces of meat projectiled by the devotees. Such religious offerings *of chotu would also take place at the prangans of adjacent goddesses, Chandika Devi, Hari Bhagwati and Sidha Lakshmi

Bhagwati, as the respective deities of the Pandit families. Krishna's father would bring chutoo, on various Saturdays, especially, after the harvesting season was over. During post-migration period, he longed for performing this puja as before, but because of restrains and restrictions, he was compelled to live on memories only. Still, the family believes that the deity continues to shower blessings on them unabated. The birth day of Mata Hari is celebrated on Ashad Novme every year. Even now, Yagna is performed during the night of Ashad ashtami and porun ahuthi takes place in the after-noon of Novmi. After the yagna is over the devotees are served food as prashad in the prangans of Chakrishora.

Krishna recollects the desolating days following the completion of his bachelor's degree in science. Since, he had failed to get admission as a regular student for undergoing Master's degree in Kashmir University, with no other alternative but to wait for a suitable opportunity for fulfilling his ambition. His financial condition was not so stable; he tried to devise ways and means of earning money both for sustenance as well as pursuing his goal. But, soon he realized that he was losing the ground.He started feeling frustrated. There were signs of negative traits developing within him. He began confining himself to the four walls of his house and with every passing day, defeatist attitude strengthened its hold on him. But somehow, he found the repose at the feet of Sharika Bhawani at Hariparvat and in the temple premises of Lord Narayana. By almighty's grace, he was back to his normal self. Thereafter, he maintained no fixed timing for prostrating before his protectors. Early morning, noon or evening, it all depended upon his mood and he would either set out for Hariparvat Parikrama or have the Darshanas of Naranjoo at Bulbul Lanker. Once, on the auspicious occasion of Deepawali festival, without informing anybody at home, he left for the parikrama and on reaching Chakrishour, he started assisting Brahmins in lighting the Diwali lamps, joined Aarti and after the puja session was over, he descended the stairs on Hari Bhagwati side, lighted a few lamps there. Next on reaching Ram temple infront of Devi Sidhalaksmi's Asthapan, Krishna found one great Bhakta/ devotee busy decorating the temple and Devi's abode. He assisted him in lighting oil lamps on the stairs of Sidha Lakshmi. It is important to mention here that the Stairs leading to Sidhalaksmi's Sheilla had been constructed, exclusively as a result of the personal efforts of this poor gentleman, a postman by profession. From here Krishna went to Pukheribal.

When he reached home, it must have been very late at night. And once he entered the gates, everyone started firing at him. He had a tough time in bringing the situation under control.

Krishna in his description of the group of Prabhat Pharie ascending the stairs leading to the prangans of Chakrishour, recalled that this group of devotees would recite particular hymns while applying paste of Sindoor dissolved in ghee, over the Sheilla, decorated it with garlands and silver foils almost on daily bases. They would carve yantras on the Sheilla, by affixing or arranging flower petals in an artistic manner. Concluding prayers (Aarti), would be offered before descending a newly constructed stairway, the lower end of which led the devotees into a narrow path that ran through the forest patch on north side of the hill. A walk with devotees through this small patch of forest land was an unforgettable experience.

In early 1970s, probably, at the instance of the then P.M, late Smt. Indra Gandhi, who on one of her visits must have felt the need of converting the left over/un-grabbed pieces of sloppy land into forest. She took personal interest in ensuring the maintenance of the ecology of the place and sure enough her proposed aforestation scheme was implemented in quite earnestness by state authorities. This step helped a great deal in converting the left over barren slopes into beautiful forest patches on western and northern sides of the hill. This way the beauty and sanctity of the place was preserved to a great extent. In-fact, it gave a new look to this sacred place both on leeward as well on the hinder side. What people have made of it these days is a different story. One of the prabhat pharie groups had an opportunity of seeing Mrs Indra Gandhi face to face on one of her visits to the valley, sometime before her tragic death in 1984. She had appeared at the lower Dwaars of Chakrishour temple, so unceremoniously in the early morning hours, that no body had the slightest idea that it could be the arrival of the Prime Minister of the Country. Without any pomp and show, she arrived in her car, parked it, came out of it and walked up to the Dwaar/ gate with officials, bowed there and in a flash of a second was seen running up the-stairs. She did not stop till she reached the upper gates. Purohits felt panicky. One of them was seen rushing up and down the stairs, fetching from the nearby house the silver Patras/vessels and other items required for the performance of pooja. All this time, she was seen completely lost in meditation. While purohits started reciting

shaloks/ verses from religious scriptures, she stood motionless before the Sheilla. There was a feel of supernatural power prevailing all over and the entire gathering chanted hymns in perfect rhyme and rhythm. An ardent devotee that she must have been, she looked all calm and composed. At the end of Puja, she leant herself slightly against the pillar. From her appearance, it could be envisaged that she must have been in Transce. Her bright dazzling face reflected the innocence of a cute child. Quite surprisingly, in next few seconds; she was in her normal self, warmly interacting with the devotees. During course of discussion, she is said to have shown lot of concern regarding the total neglect of ecology in the valley in general and Hariparvat, Shankracharya hill and Dal Lake in particular. Despite all efforts including spending thousands of crores of rupees, things had not improved the way she probably would have expected. Hariparvat, once famous for Badamfly /Almond blossoms, had become densely populated almost on all sides and was probably the dirtiest part of the city at present. It is quite depressing that there has been no one to reflect upon the insensibility of the authorities concerned. The people holding sway have had little time to think over the problems the place faces. Even now, they display no concern on environmental degradation in and around this area. They hardly understand the fact that the place, where land utilization for human habitation ought to have been restricted, inaction was bound to pose problems for the future generation. Pertinent to mention here that in the past people used to come here not only to have daily worshipping, but also to ascend the oxygen rich slopes to keep their bodies physically fit. The freshness of air around place could keep the person cheerful for the entire day. During spring season people usually gathered at these places with choicest eatables and enjoyed the nature blooming with beauty. Irrespective of the fact whether the prayers to Gods and Goddesses lead to salvation, a walk round this place, at least provided a rare opportunity for both Hindus and Muslims to breathe fresh morning air, not so easily available in the congested areas of city elsewhere. People ought to have taken up the issues of over-exploitation of land and water resources, especially, around these places. But, leaving apart the question of taking remedial measures, there has not been a single voice raised on such vital issues. Unfortunately, problems, with definite bearing on the future, have remained out of the contours of social discussions and therefore left unaddressed to. There are people who only know inciting

and playing with the public sentiments. They stir up the emotions of masses on petty issues. They are more often interested in redrafting and rewriting the chapters of history that suit their thought perception and subsequently help them in the promotion of their social and political agenda. They rarely hesitate indulging in distorting the established facts. However they need to know that acts like renaming the places of historical importance, shall hardly wipe off the deep imprints of the ages from the land of Rishi's and Munnis. The toil of sages, who gathered the wealth of knowledge during thousands of years, cannot go waste, simply with persecutions and destructions that has been going on since long. After all, truth has to prevail. Distortions neither serve the purpose for which these are intended nor do such manipulations help in hiding the bitter truths that some people are scared off. The pages of history may come under the cover of dust, but the written contents can never get washed away even by the heavy brushing of the time. Truth has to come out some day, no matter how deep it is buried or who digs it out, from where and when. For our existence in present is because of our past and it is on the basis of this past that we have the prospect of future, if one intends not to own the history of one's past, one simply hinders the path leading to the progress and not the course of history.

Perhaps, it will suit the occasion to give a brief account on how one of the greatest (sofee) saints of Kashmir; Sheikh Noor-ul-Din Noorani Rehmat-ullahhi-Allah, reacted after he had his birth in a family with parents that belonged to an ordinary background. He refused to suck milk from his mother's nipples. Lalh Ded, the greatest saint and mystic poetess, whom people regarded as incarnation of Mother Goddess, was requested to bless the child. She showed her willingness to visit the place, where the neonate was born. All this time the child's mother had been wailing as the accumulated milk within her swollen nipples, was giving her terrible pain. But, the child continued to show reluctance in accepting the mother's feed. Once Lalh Ded arrived, mother felt her pain gone all of a sudden. She started pleading for the safety of her Neonate. Lalh Ded heard patiently and even though she knew that the neonate may have genuine reservations. She raised the pitch of her voice, as if, to scold and then straight away addressed the baby, reminded it that it had no reason to feel shy in sucking nipples of the women for milk feed,

for it had been in her womb for nine months prior to its birth and that it had already enjoyed the feed during those months. Her tone was very authoritative. While sermonizing the child in local language, she said, “Chhah malie chhahe, Zayanneh yalineh mandchook, chhanae kayazeh chukh mandchaan,” implying that choice of taking birth was not within its power and thus, feeling ashamed of having been born to the lady or refusing feed from her nipples, had no justification. She further adviced the child that it should not feel guilty of that past, over which it had had little or no control. The baby immediately responded and was seen accepting the milk feed.

One can not ignore the past only because it presents something that goes against one’s taste and temperament. Such thought process is simply ridiculous, past is the reason for evolution of the present, which in turn is the reflection of future. Preservation of culture and subsequently understanding the philosophy behind the traditions and customs is an important aspect of social life. Culture is a possession that one should feel proud of. It is by associating and identifying one’s self with it that one gets a better insight in to the realms of past, which in turn helps in knowing the self and thereby refining and restructuring one’s thought process. An illustration on usefulness of preserving our age old customs may satisfy the readers to some extent. For centuries, Kashmiris have been holding a belief that fresh waters in the rivers and rivulets start flowing from Amawasi following Shivratri, (called Doone Mavas, the fifteenth day of Krishna Paksha, the first fortnight of Phaguna.). It may not carry any scientific connotation, but there can be no denying of the fact that religious sanctity apart, a significant background behind such festivals, does make the celebration a sensible affair. Change of seasons and typical terms associated with them, like chilla kallan or chilla Khurd or chilla bacha, (Words being persian in origin) prove with quite definiteness that people had purpose in recognizing the importance of maintaining so called calendar of cultural events, especially, when it came to the defining of the characteristics of the cyclic changes that people were subjected to on yearly basis. Weather conditions like the one that are experienced at the onset of chilly spell or the festivals / social customs, associated with such a change, more or less serve as guide. It does help in predicting the nature of the change expected at any interval of time in a yearly cycle and thus the subsequent impact on the life of residents. Commencement

of a fortnight, a week before the Shiv Raatri festival and a week thereafter, would surprisingly bring in a visible freshness in the life of the people. The rivers, the lakes and all other water bodies would be seen swelling steadily after low oozing and modest flow experienced during the peak wintry months. Like-wise, as soon as the festival of Janam Ashtami would be over, one would feel an automatic change, the gushing air so soothing and charming till now, would suddenly start piercing straight in to the bones and thus developed cracks in the skin. Obviously, it was an announcement of approaching winter season. Here, the purpose is not that of promoting a mere religious belief, but to emphasize the role that social customs play in proper understanding of the complexities of Nature. Continuous observations lead to experiences and accumulation of experiences subsequently to evolution of truth.

There can be difference of opinion on whether one belief is superior to or better than the other. But customs, traditions or cultures like climatic changes follow their own course and leave hardly any scope for difference of opinion amongst the inhabitants. It is here that one has to stand above prejudices. One should feel proud of and lay stress on the preservation of the keys that undeniably help in unlocking the valuable sources of knowledge, especially, regarding history and geography of the place.

Krishna feels it an appropriate occasion to acquaint the readers with true Kashmiri ethos. He, therefore, begins with a brief description of two greatest saints of valley, Lal/Lal Ded and Nund Rishi/Rhush. He invites readers to share some drops of nectar, collected by accident from the ocean of wisdom left behind by the two saints. He is frank in admitting that a subject of such a sensitive nature required an expertise of a reputed scholar, which was not forthcoming during the time of this composition. Thus, the modest effort, particularly, when neither extensive research nor document based study on the subject matter could be undertaken nor were the in-puts for the purpose so easily accessible due to migration. The material that some generous people forwarded or the sources that one could lay hand on that time, were in certain cases not literally so reliable and further explicitly quite insufficent. In the end, it was decided to write whatever one knew about the two great saints either from the details passed on by the elders or simply make use of selected material from substantive collections. Since, these two saints have

erected the pillars on which the foundation of our composite culture is believed to be based on. A philosophy, distinct in nature and intellectual in character, a continuation of Kashmir Monolithic Shiva cult, probably best understood and practiced by the two saints and thus the legacy they left over for the people to adopt, which Hindus call Rishi cult and Muslims the Sofee-ism, is, obviously, the priceless gift that the two greatest souls could have bestowed upon the people. The exemplary patience exhibited and the penance they under went during their life time have no parallels in the annals of Kashmir History. Lalleshwari/ Lal Ded/ Lalla Yogishwari, was born in 1355 at Pandrethan, in the outskirts of Srinagar city (Purana adhisthana, capital city in bygone days). She had her in-law residents of Pampur (Padampura), eventually; she was renamed as Padmavati by in- laws. She is said to have suffered a great deal of mental and physical torture at the hands of her in-laws, with the exception of her father-in-law. People say that her mother-in-law would create all sorts of problems and thus testing her forbearance. She would never approve of her qualities or admire her worth either at the spinning wheel or in the discharge of her domestic duties. Even the thinnest of the spun thread, would be rejected and thrown away. They say that Lal/Lhal Ded was served meals in a dish, called Rikeb in Kashmiri, which had a slope towards the deep centre. At the time of serving the food, mother-in-law would keep the heavy piece of stone called Neil wath in the centre of the plate and then wrap it artistically with cooked rice from above; just to give the impression that Lal Ded consumed lot of food. Obviously, such a distressing atmosphere could lead anyone to a virtual depression. But, she did not let herself to be distracted or driven to desperation; instead she took refuge in a creative work. She had a gifted quality of composing wakhs that displayed the state of agony that she under went during the different stages of her life.Take for instance"Lalhe neila Watteh Chalena Zahn" and "Kateh kateh akuth goomee" proverbs that depict her woeful tales and provide similies to people while defining their destiny and capability. Lal Ded preferred to spend her spare time on the banks of Vitasta Nadhi in the neighbourhood. It is said that once she went to fetch water in a pitcher, her un-expected delay at the Ghat made her husband to lose his temper. He tried to hit her head with a stick, which resulted in breaking the earthen pitcher, but the water in the pitcher solidified on her head instantaneously, which as per the legend became the source of one of the streamlets lateron. If things are seen

the other way round, it appears that her mother-in-law was her real guide and guru, who probably did all this drama for preparing Lhal/ Lal Ded for her predestined journey on the toughest spiritual path. Therefore, the trauma Lhal/Lal-Ded passed through may in reality not have been on account of mal-treatment, she meted out at the hands of the people or her in-laws, but because of her inability of understanding the riddles of nature in the initial stages or so to say her eagerness and intense craving for knowing the secret of nothingness within herself. The word watteh used by her in the wakh connotes the pain that she might have felt in her heart, while awaiting bliss from Him. Since, she had a focussed mind from the very beginning and as the days passed on, she kept on baking her body and mind like the wet earthenware vessel in the burning kiln. She makes mention of the hardships, she faced and the pain she underwent, while finding the passage through different stages of her tapa. Here, one can not help quoting some of her composed vaks,"Guaran maalie dopnam konuee waachunn, Nibreh dopnam andhar aachun, Tehe meh gauve Lalie wakh teeh wachun, Aadhe maalie huath Lalie Naagahy/Neehangahy nachun," Literally meaning that Guru taught her only one mantra/ a single sermon, that was to lay stress on concentrating her efforts in freeing herself from the artificially created bonds, Maya-zalh. Guru insisted upon her to gather the split ingredient of her person for freeing herself from non-existing difference between inner and outer worlds. He calls upon her to forget the distinction and try to seek the entry into a boundless real world, within her inner-self, which she did quite gracefully and thus it became her ultimate destiny and thereafter she, esthetically, took to dancing without caring for covering her body within any protective veil. However, for deeper and much accurate meaning of the vakh, Philosophers of Kashmir Shivaism look at it in a slightly different perspective and explain it as follows: They say, initially Lal Ded had created an imaginary division, a boundary between the outer world and her inner self. She had thought she could hide things or nourish some secrets within herself because of the apparent existence of the division, but once Guru made her to peep into her innerself for ascertaining whether there was any thing that she could call as being hidden from Him. Having realized that there was no real curtain to differentiate the inner atman from outer one and therefore, it was no use hiding things which could never be hidden She understood that as a human being she had falsely fabricated a

division which kept her away from the truth. Thus, the occasion chosen by the Guru proved a good omen, a beginning of clear vision, a bliss associated with unending joy that made her dance (Neehangahy) aesthetically. In another verse, "Gauran maalie mehy pruchum saaseehe latay, yesneh khye Wanann, Taas khya chueh naavae; Guaruee chu Ishwar, Guaruee chu Mehashwar, Guaruee chu mole thyh, Gauruee maajee, Guaruee choo saakhshyaathkar, Guaruee choo dhewaan trenn bhawnan taar." the wakh literally refers to the question put to Lal Ded by the Guru thousand times," How do you call, him who bears no name?" In other words, he asks her to name Him, whom she does not properly recognize and can hardly call Him by any name. In the succeeding lines literally speaking, Lalh Ded defines the qualities of a Guru and absolute truth. She says that Guru is Ishwara, Guru is Parameshwara, Guru is Shiva, Guru is your father and Guru is your mother, Guru is the reality/ real self and he alone can guide and take one out of the whirl pool. Guru taught and even made her to experience the thousand stages that yogis have to pass through before reaching a point, where the merger into the ultimate truth is finally achieved. Here the reference seems to concur with the seventh stage of Kundalini or of Chakra system, known as Saasrara, lying over the roof of the head, literally meaning thousand petalled, symbolizing a state, where individual becomes Annant, endless or the universe in itself. Yet again in another beautiful verse, she says," Snae khooteh soown chuh manneh koe samandhar, woteth laayee khaal mukhtehhaar, sathchya rajeeh lamm, sat chee wathye paakh, Aadhe maalie labhak bawserstaar," which in ordinary sense means the deepest of the deep seas is the mind, go and jump into it and get the precious Necklace/garland of pearls out of it. Pull the rope that leads to truth, follow the path of righteousness, only then can you achieve the goal or be able to cross the stormy ocean. Shivaists hold that Lal Ded practiced Kundalini and it was the experience, she refers to as deepest of the deep seas which she churned and wherefrom she got the attributes of mukhti, the liberation. While lamenting on her plight, she says," Oo HayLalie bah khya karh yeeman panchan dahan teh kahan, yemh yath lejee vokhol kareeth gahe, Saarhee saamhan aaksee razeh lamhan, aadhe malie kyaze raveehay kahan gaaw," Oh, Lalie, what should I do with these five, ten and eleven? Probably referring to wayward elements like sense organs etc, for she says that they are the ones, who stirred the pot from top to bottom. Should they all come together and pull a

single rope, why then should they lose hold on the cow, the innocent atmamn. From the point of view of a Shivaist, the verse is all about the control mechanism of Indreyas. While probing her inner self, she laments, ("Hye lalie beh khya aashcss, tehh meakhya raang gomee, aamee bahh raangne kornam hodhe.)" Alas! What I used to be and what colour I have assumed during the course of time, is a total mismatch, a situation that has developed a furrow within me". "Kunee aasesth dahan hundh zang puome, souee maye Lalie guome shahath kanee soore".Being alone, she says, she caught the rust and dust because of Indreyas and thus became subject of involvement, which made powder of a rock like person called Lal Ded. Some probably misinterpret the wakh by saying that she got her name laleh, because she had developed a laleh, an extra skin on her belly, which hung down covering her private parts, when she moved or danced in a fit of heavenly ecstasy without clothes on, the extra skin that time served her as natural cover. But that is not true. In-fact, it is quite contrary to what her wakh actually refers to. Yet again, in another wakh," Aayes wahthay Gayes wahthay saehymanz shoothay lousoomh dooh, vouchuimm chandas haar no hoahtyh yaath navee taaras bheh demh kehya, Aandher baeh aayes chandram gaarnay, baaeh aayess he henny hee, panahy wuchum beheth dookanas, paney wuchum panas aathe daran, hay Narayan yeem kamveer, aamay paneh sohadhras Navee chus lamann, baozenah souy Dhye muyoon dhee mehth taar, aaman taakhan ponheh chu shamanh, mannh chumh bramaan gharhe gachehaa, khechan malie dutnam tooreh aalove, kehhchan malie rateth hye nalay waath, kehychan malie mus chath aache lageh taalwas papyche, kehhchan maalie chaneh deyontoot lalie gyan raveeth, kahychan malie dhetooth cha gyaw totooye, keyhchan malie yateeh chey bakchut, kehhchan malie dhetooth manz gateh gaash, babery langas mooshek noo moray, hoonee bastehe kofoor narnhee zahn", Lalh Ded tells us that she came by a route, followed the route, but in the middle of the journey; she saw that the sun set was approaching near. As she reached at the banks to board the boat, she searched her pockets; there was not a single penny to pay the boatsman for going across. Here a person of her stature makes an admission of having hardly any punneh karma to her credit. How could she think of crossing the Bowsara? She felt confused as she peeped inside searching for illumination in darkness, she saw Him occupying the seat of a shop-keeper. He was stretching His own hands before Himself. Oh! Lord Narayana, who

this bravest soul could have been? However, despite such bewilderment, she tries to pull the boat through the ocean with the help of unwoven thread, would that Lord listen to her prayers and take her across, for her unbaked earthen plates laden with water are moistened and she is tempted to visit her home. She cries at her deprived lot. She acknowledges that some are gifted with the mystic call from above, to some brook hinders the path, while to some, He bestows the lost wisdom. Oh, Lallie, some are lucky to have nectar to drink and their drunken eyes are struck at the ceiling, to some He offers hot ghee as a drink, while some are forgiven in this very world and are shown light out of darkness. This drama makes her to confess that neither the branch of wild grass would give scent, nor would the dog skin yield camphor. Certainly bad has to be differentiated from the good. But then, her great tapa did not fail her for she ultimately achieved the goal. She had the realization of spiritual experiences, her merger in the oneness of God, which she so beautifully narrated in her wakhs. Omeeh aadhi tahy Omeeh poruam Omeseeth thorum/ omnehthroym pannueey paan**omeeadheth nahth basuume aadh lalie provom paramsathan, ome aakh aacharporum**sooee malie manasmanz mukhtihaar jarum.....telhe malie parzenovue mya pannun*paan (last line is probably distorted).In her above quoted verses, she says that she used to recite only the word Om, for Om was the beginning, the centre and the end of the ultimate path that she made herself to pass through and that is how she got to the blissful stage and attained the state of peace and tranquility. Hardly has any saint in India ever been able to throw light on mystic subjects or even described its contours with such clarity and ease. Rarely is there any subject relevant in today's life that she does not seem to have touched in her waks. Her forecasts and parables are as true and applicable today as these have been in bygone days. How easily she could traverse and tread the artificial boundaries standing between her inner-self and the outer world, is clearly reflected in her poetry. As a great Sivate, she refers to the visions that she had of the inaccessible heights, the blissful state. In a sense, she was perhaps, the first to use common and understandable language to communicate and reveal the hither indescribable, unfamiliar and unknown secrets of the world beyond the comprehension of common man. It also goes to her credit to express in plain terms that the truth can be approached by any number of ways. She never showed any conflict with the innumerable paths that could be adopted for

the realization of the absolute truth. Therefore, without any dispute she laid the solid foundations of what certain people call the composite culture of Kashmir that the valley is known for. In one of her wakhs she calls upon the people not to make difference between a man and a man on the basis of religion. It is said that at the approaching end of her journey on the Earth, she dramatized her exist, while showing her willingness to take refuge in an oil merchant's shop, who, they say, refused her entry into the place. She, therefore, had to go inside the baker's shop in the immediate neighbourhood, who welcomed her and as such, bliss was bestowed upon him. Thus, the parable goes as,"Aayae vanis teeh gaeh Kaandrus".

Sure enough, Nund Rishi, a true disciple of Lhal Ded, followed the foot steps of his guide/ Guru. At the very early stage of his life, he started probing into the complexities of cause and effect. By and by he understood the truth. He did realize the futility of evolving the senseless distinction between the outer depiction and the inner-self. While preparing himself for entering in to the mystic contours, he imposed self restrictions on himself, avoided all bodily enjoyments and chose strict vegetarian diet. Using term vegetarian does hardly qualify his diet ingredients here, for he avoided taking any thing that he felt had life. He would never pluck green leaves or grains, lest he may become the cause of taking the life of any living creature. First he would wait for a leaf to fade and fall down from the plant and only then would he think of utilizing material for consumption. In the event of non-availability of such aahar, he would observe complete fast. And his fast would last till he was sure that consumption of the dry lifeless leaves for his sustenance did not harm any of the living creatures. Whenever hunger started tormenting him, he would tie stones round his belly, just to support his loosening muscles. He loved the poor and the down trodden. As a great mystic poet, his poetry opened the lid to the sacred treasure of knowledge.

It is said that once on a formal invitation of a rich man, he visited his house in the guise of a beggar in rags. The house was full of influential guests. They eagerly waited for the Great Sage, Noor-ul-Din Noorani R.A, or better known as Nund Rishi, to join them at the feast, which had been arranged in his honour. But, once he arrived in an un-usual ragged robe, he was neither recognized nor did anyone take notice of him. He was not offered even a glass of water. He left the rich-man's house, in quite earnestness, without uttering even a

word. Later on, in the evening, he revisited the same house, but this time wearing a beautiful Alwan/white Pashmina robe with skin tight white trousers, white linen turban on the head, zariya shoes and a white pashmina chadder on the shoulders. The moment he arrived, every one present there stood up. They made the path for him. This time he was shown great respect and regard. The house owner came in person, offered big dinner plate, known as trammi or thall in Kashmiri, which had been filled with delicious food items, comprising of cooked rice, different varieties of veg-preparations. Nund Rishi, while un-wrapping his alwan sleeves, let these hung with hands within. People say that he murmured "Zeethaev narev khaev saal" let the long sleeves have the feast. Leaving the trammi untouched, he left the house then and there. A simple parable like this explains the importance that the dress plays in soulless high-fie societies. However, this incident carries still deeper meaning that people quite often fail to appreciate and recognize the inner beauty; for they are betrayed by the outer appearances and material wealth. Thus, they suffer pain in the end.

This great saint believed in the path of karma, for in one of his verses, narrated accidentally to Krishna by one of his colleagues, he lays stress on the virtues of such a path by quoting: "Sobhu phool teih raath gaie aadhah, aathi kath buethukh raadha deeth, faraz thi saanat kar malie aadha, Jantaas neneoyo naadha dhith." He says that the morning sun has set in and the night is over. Why are you sitting in leisure? Do your duty and follow the righteous path, only then shall there be a call from the heavens. Now, besides being mystic, he was also a great environmentalist. His poetry had the depth of the oceans and height of the skies. But then he also moved amongst common people, he believed himself as one amongst them and even behaved like them. He had thorough understanding of their problems. He once said "un poshi tali yalli wan poshi", meaning that food will last only when woods/forests last. Commenting on the important features of stable family unit, he says," Akis mallie zhane che shehej booni; lanjeeh lanjeeh pehrys karhs waav; baakis mallie zhanne chaye chaapal hooni tounwv tounwv krays chhuness waave "That a fortunate man has his better half, like a chinar tree, in whose shade he gets all the comforts, even the movements in her branches convey the feel of welcome and greeting, while the man, who has his wife, behaving like a hound, her habit of constant barking usually brings

in distress, misery and misfortune. It would be relevent to quote few more verses/ shrukh for readers among Kashmiri Muslims,"Koran paraan kouneh mudookh, Koran paran daodh mansoor; Koran paran zindhe kounehy roodookh, Koran paran koneh gooue sooree"'. Here emphasis is made on understanding and following the Koranic verses in the true spirit and not merely on translation of words. Another shrukh refers to His bliss" Khehenchhe mallie kabber chehyi poosh zann shaaray; Khenchea kabber chhye seeyah chah; khen mallie gyuoee chanay vyaray; Kehn goeeh zaray akeh gumrah:' The saint here draws the difference, between people who have His grace for attaining rightful place, while those deprived of his blessings, do fall from the heavens on account of their deeds .

The coverage on remaining part of prabhat pharie had been deferred for a while and would follow soon, for Krishna was of the opinion that the intruption was worth it. He could hardly afford to miss the opportunity of sharing the foregoing excerpts with readers, for such a dissertation had definite relevance in context to the situation prevalent in the valley. Religious intolerance, discriminating attitude of dominant community and the ruling class towards minorities belonging to other religions, is a matter of grave concern. History is full of instances, where people at the helm of affairs have demonstrated discrimination on the basis of religion, caste or creed, the path totally negated to by all the sages and saints and very rightly so. In this behalf, narrating following incident is likely to suit the occasion.

It is about an Afghan Governor, Jabbar Khan, who ruled over Kashmir a few centuries back. This man had to confront a bizarre kind of situation after he showed complete disregard for the religious feelings of the subjects that belonged to a different faith. He was so callous that he prevented them from celebrating a festival that epitomized their faith and culture. He had an order issued, wherein members of the Hindu community were directed that no smoke should come out of their houses on the eve of Shivratri festival. Further to add salt to the sore, he gave them an option that they could celebrate this festival on any other day in the month of July and not on actual date, provided the entire valley received snow fall on that particular occasion. In a sense, he demanded these people to put forth the evidence that could validate their faith and belief. One can see through the cunning nature of this man, who was outrightly against

celebrations of such a great festival. He wanted the infidels to read in between the lines. The conditions set, in his option, were obvious. It is a different matter that the people accepted the challenge.They gathered courage and prevailed upon him to grant the permission for celebrating the festival even with the dates changed. He had to declare the celebrations of Shivratri festival in the month of Ashard/ July, instead of Phagun/ feburary, provided valley experienced a snow fall that day. To expect such a thing to happen on a hot summer day, (in month of July), was like expecting a miracle to happen. But then, such things do take place at times. It actually started snowing on that particular day, something unheard of in Kashmir summers. The ruler in amazement named the festival as Herath (Meaning; Surprising/ astronishing). From that day Shivratri came to be known as Herath. To express their bitter hatred for the unpredictable Governor, whose ordinance had not only resulted in the failure of crops that season, but had caused numerous hardships to masses, people quite aptly nick-named the Governor as “Jabbar jhandhe, Haaras onnun wandh”, which literally means, Jabbar had to wear woolen rags for inviting winter in summer. The narration of this episode is not meant to make people believe that miracles happen every time the people face problems. Had it been so, people for fear of being cursed, would have desisted from committing heinous crimes. Kashmir would not have seen foreign Governors like Jabar Khan and Kakad Khan, latter one, a hot headed person, who, probably, sighted a corpse carried by people in a coffin on his maiden entry into the valley. He stopped the people, got the coffin opened and started chopping the ear of the corpse. On being asked why he did so. Sharp came the reply from the in-coming Governor that the purpose was to convey to the people of the valley that they would have no respite from this change as well. With his arrival more of trouble was expected. But, then times change and so do the situations; neither good nor bad times are permanent in nature.

World is full of riddles that continue to tease the mind. Unfolding these puzzle require an intellect. But then faith is equally important. Faith can move mountains. Intellect without faith leads to arrogance and faith without intellect means dogmatism. Therefore, solution to problems lays both in the use of intellect as well as having firm faith.

It is not always enough to feel proud of having roots in a particular place, or be the progeny of some superior race or claiming that God

created valleys, lakes, river and mountains in one day, for the comforts of man alone (Nature for Ashraf-ul-maklukat). But then rights always demand duties, as otherwise, it becomes one sided affair. If God provided man with resources, it also gave him intellect to have proper and optimum use of these gifts. Other-wise, there is every apprehension of their turning wild and creating havoc. Therefore, merely because a person was born in a place neither confers upon him the right to claim it as his inherent property nor has he the right to plunder it, the way he likes. Air, water and Earth are for everyone and nobody's personal domain. Nature is not averse to being tamed provided the efforts are aimed at developing a system, where co-existence of all the living and non-living things is made possible.



Side view of Hariparvat from Kathei Darwaza

Thus, whether water is contained in tumbler or tumbler contains water, in both the cases water is held and the tumbler holds. Who holds whom and who lives for and on whom, is a subject beyond the scope of this book. Maintaining balanced relationship and upholding the principle of live and let live, would mean an establishment of the norms of a civilized society, Surely such a society would be the greatest tribute to the saints and scholars, who created a unique culture that all Kashmiris ought to be proud of. But of the late, things have not

moved in the right direction. Leaving aside the exploitation of Nature and its resources, there has been an exploitation of man against man, and that too for no apt reason. What justification is there when you force one entire community to migrate in the name of jihad? Same has been the case with nature. At one point of time, the area around Hariparvat was entirely pollution free, perhaps, one of the cleanest parts of the city. Shockingly, it presents a horrible picture to-day, whether it is the use of land for human habitation, or preservation of ecology in and around its vicinity? Authorities have shown no concern in this behalf. The borders of the sacred hillock have been made to shrink terribly, the process is continuing unchecked even today. People, who have come to settle here, have raised huge buildings. They have in a sense developed constant craving for excavation and extraction of earth with the sole motive of grabbing as much of land as possible, thereby, shrinking the hill space without a feel of guilt, an illegal and unethical act that poses greatest threat to the very existence of the hill, which if viewed in the right perspective, will reveal the fact that it has considerably been reduced in size and immediate steps, if not taken, can lead to a situation, where the people may have to call it Kohi Madaan or perhaps Madaan Mohalla instead of Hariparvat, (Some enthusiast have started naming it Koh-I Maran). People around may not know that such an act poses danger to the people that reside there, besides hurting the feelings of those whose ethos and religious beliefs revolve round Sri-chakra of Chakreshwara, an essential part of their cultural history. This fact can not be discarded simply because of the systemic prejudice against a particular section of people. Religious thoughts/ beliefs of the people may differ but so far as the culture is concerned, it is something inherent and cannot be disowned even if one wants to. Every individual belongs to the culture he is born in, whether he accepts it or not and cannot get rid off it. In-fact, religions can cross the boundaries, culture is something which is defined and confined in relation to a particular place or society. Thus, preserving one's culture implies preserving one's identity. *Sometimes, it may demand sacrifice and those who shirk, definitely lose the treasure. Thus, places like Hariparvat have to be protected at any cost, It may be added here that the portion of Hariparvat hill had alreay been leveled,' which can find evidence in the fact that while going down from Hawal to Vichar–Nag, there are mounds here and humps there. The slopes simply depict that in the past the area must have been an extension

of Hariparvat hill. It might have been levelled at different times at different places for human habitation. Soura/Vichar-Nag area, well known for being the epicentre of various political and literary activities in the past, a city in its own right both in modern as well as in ancient times, if visited from back side/ inner Saderbal side, would amply clarify the hypothesis.Vichar Nag is an important religious place for Hindus A big temple, besides other smaller ones, was a site for meeting of scholars and learned people, who discussed, deliberated and pondered over problems and riddles and more often succeeded in finding out the solutions too, and thus the place most aptly got the name Vichar Nag. Presently the temple houses a fresh water spring in the sanctum sanatoria. The water oozing out of the main spring is usually cold during summer months and hot in winter season. It must have been a source of drinking water for the inhabitants of the area, as the channel coming out of the temple would pass through low lying areas and would probably merge with the waters of Anchar Lake. Its flow has considerably gone down or probably plugged or reduced by the locals, as the channel is not visible along road side these days. Perhaps underground pipes have been laid to carry out the water somewhere else. The portion of the road between Hawal and Baghi Ali Mardan Khan, area could boast of possessing many archeological sites till recently, but these sites have been removed deliberately by insane and selfish elements, which from archeological point of view can be termed as most unfortunate happenings. Lack of concern shown towards preserving of such important sites, both by the department concerned and public at large is highly deplorable. The areas on the eastern side are more or less sloppy and at places forming the shores of Dal lake. A scientific survey of the entire topography would probably lead one to conclude that it might have been a part of the Hariparvat hill in the past. Evidently so, as the impression one gathers from the interior parts like Bagh-i-Ali-Mardan Khan and other adjoining areas of the place extending up to Waris Khanun Chahh. (Waris Khanun Chahh had been the site of a central Jail during and after King Akbar's reign, which had a deep well like structure dug in the middle, serving as death trap for the prisoners facing death penalties. Probably there was an underground tunnel connecting the Jail with Emperor's palaces. Till recently people used to assemble here during early spring season to enjoy the almond blossom on the slopy ground of historical importance. Unfortunately, this piece of land has been utilized for purpose that has direct bearing on the ecology of the place.)



Ruins of Hanuman Temple near Pokherbal/Mental Hospital

Coming back to the dirtiest patch of road on prabhat-pharie parikrama route, especially, from Ram temple to Mental hospital and from Kathi darwaza to Kallie-andhar, it presents the most dreadful picture. Moreso, when the Government itself is the major contributor to the pollution in the form of bird waste and filth dumped by the Government hatchery, established on the right side of the foot hill, destroying sanctity of the entire area beyond description. Even the area, starting from Sidha Lakshmi's Sheilla to Hanuman temple has not been spared. Vested interests have encouraged the people to construct houses up to the higher slopes of the hill and on the places which were earlier protected by way of restrictions posed by the state and certain religious groups. A small temple dedicated to Lord Hunuman, at some distance from Mental hospital, on the main road leading to Kathi darwaza, had a big piece of land attached to it earlier.

This temple was burnt down by insane elements in addition to already referred temples including Ram-Koulun-temple during the turmoil of 1990. The said piece of land attached to the temple has either been grabbed or its area has got shrunken, because of the

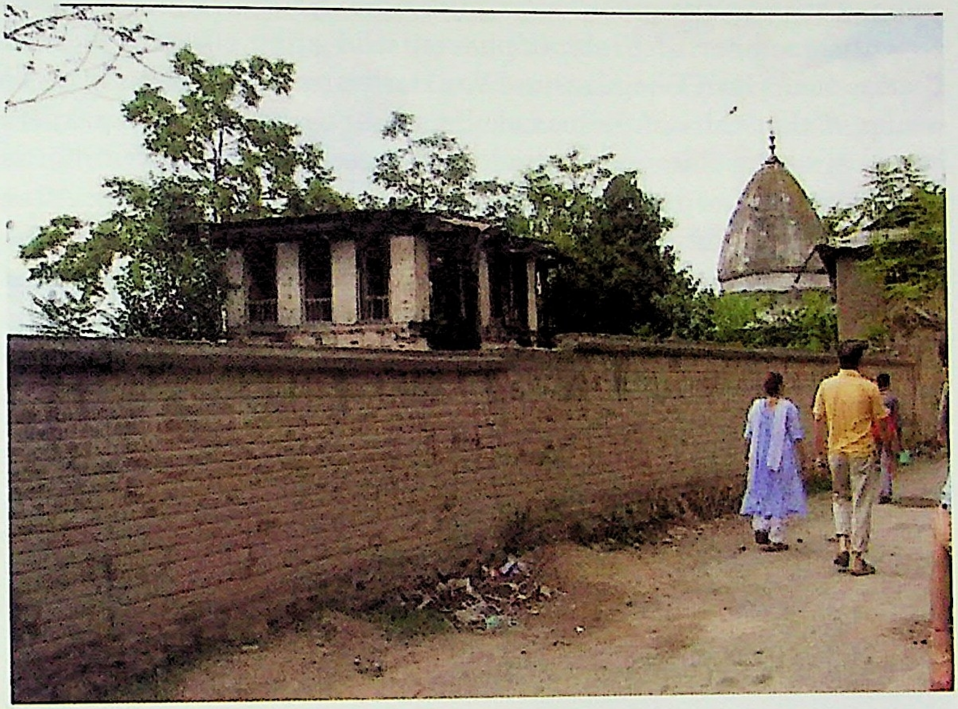
destruction and desolation of the structure. What once used to be small temple with a garden full of variety of flowers is now a destination of the heaps of filth and dirt.



Stairs Sidha Lakshmi's Shilla

Inability to resist temptation of peeping into the areas of specific interest, Krishna, who is impulsive by nature, can hardly avoide making frequent drifts and pauses. However, this time, he is determined to restrain himself from any deviation. But when the mind is wavering, pen follows the path so his style can hardly change. Surprisingly, he starts with a scene that takes him back to normal times. Tracking the members of Chakrishuor Mandli, a group of well learned and dedicated devotees, who at one point of time included great devotees, like late Jai Lal Saraf and other prominent persons, whose dedication and commitment had been exemplary. Late Jai Lal (Koul) Saraf translated Panchestave into Kashmiri in the form called leela. Yet another man, late Sh. Neel Kant Nehru, was responsible for developing conscientious approach among community members for purpose of raising temple structure and dharmshalla within the premises of Chakri-shour, in which he showed tremendous strength of character. The proposal for similar such structures could not be finalized either due to his sad demise or lack of coherent approach on the part of community members or lateron the migration

of Hindus from valley. However, jagrans on Saturday nights continued uninterrupted till early 1990. Call of the devotional music on early Sunday mornings was sufficient to compel the man in the city of Srinagar, to start for Parikrama at the earliest.



Ram Kaulun Temple one of the burnt and desecrated temples during 1990 turmoil at Hariparvat

After performing Aarti at Ganesha temple, devotees would move in as fast as they could to reach Chakrishour for listening to the devotional music that lasted for atleast another one hour or so. As soon as jagran would be over devotees started leaving for Ram temple again in ones or twos. It may appear strange that even during normal times also ugly incidents would take place. Probably a decade prior to migration, certain insane elements stole priceless Idols of Lord Lakshmi Narayana, Lord Ram and Devi Sita, for the sake of few bucks.Their un-ethical act had hurt the sentiments of thousands of devotees. But with the start of turmoil in 1990, even the temple structure was not spared from destruction. Still the prayers and jagrans continued in the temple up to April 1990. Numbers of devotees in Prabhat Pharie had considerably gone down. There was little co-ordination and puja would be brief at all the holy spots. However, the devotees would prefer to have a stay for a while within the Ram

temple premises, where the varanda was a place that devotees would have their tired muscles relaxed with fresh air and lovely site. The place would, usually, be fully packed with people and more often they would be discussing varied subjects, like religion, politics and so on. This was true even during the time, Krishna's grand father was the member of prabhat pharie, who after offering puja at Chakrishour, Hari Bhagwati and Vamdev's turn, would usually make a stop at the stairs of Sidha Lakshmi, bow there and offer prayers before entering Ram mandir, where he would be concentrating on Lord Siva and Lord Narayana at the open window of the Dab. After a while, he would move down the road and start collecting some leaves and seeds from wild plants, which included tethwena, used as laxative for flushing out the unwanted material from the body. Once approaching the Mental hospital building, he would turn to the left, move down the lane which would lead him to the temple dedicated to Goddess Durga (Pokhrebal).



Ruins of Kallie (Portion of the wall of the old Prision) near Ram temple at Hariparvat

(On the right extreme of this Devi temple is central jail, just on the shores of Dal Lake. It was shifted to this place by Dogra Maharajas. Earlier during Mughals, the old Jail site was adjacent to Ram temple, which had perhaps become unsafe for housing the

prisoners. The still existing portion of this prison wall along the road bears testimony to the great grandeur of the bygone days.The structure in lime, brick and stone, standing along the roadside hardly hundred steps from Ram temple, can be of great archeological interest. Unfortunately, no efforts have been made to preserve the fort structure on the hill top or the Kallie or the wall under description. Mean-time, central jail has its share of history associated with Kashmiri Muslims', especially, when it comes to the celebration of 13th July as Martyr's day, the details on the subject are given in next chapter. Krishna would now be heading towards the temple gates of Goddess Durga, at Pokhrebal, (mentioned already). A beautiful and serene atmosphere prevails on all sides, with number of springs within the temple premises. One of these springs is within the temple structure with small outer hose for flow of water oozing out of spring within the temple. There is an outlet that pours water into a bigger spring besides Surya Kund. Rarely can one find a place



Durga Bhagwati's Idol and holy spring at Pokherbal Hariparvat

with such beautiful surroundings. The temple on the shores of Dal Lake provides an environment that compels one to go into transce

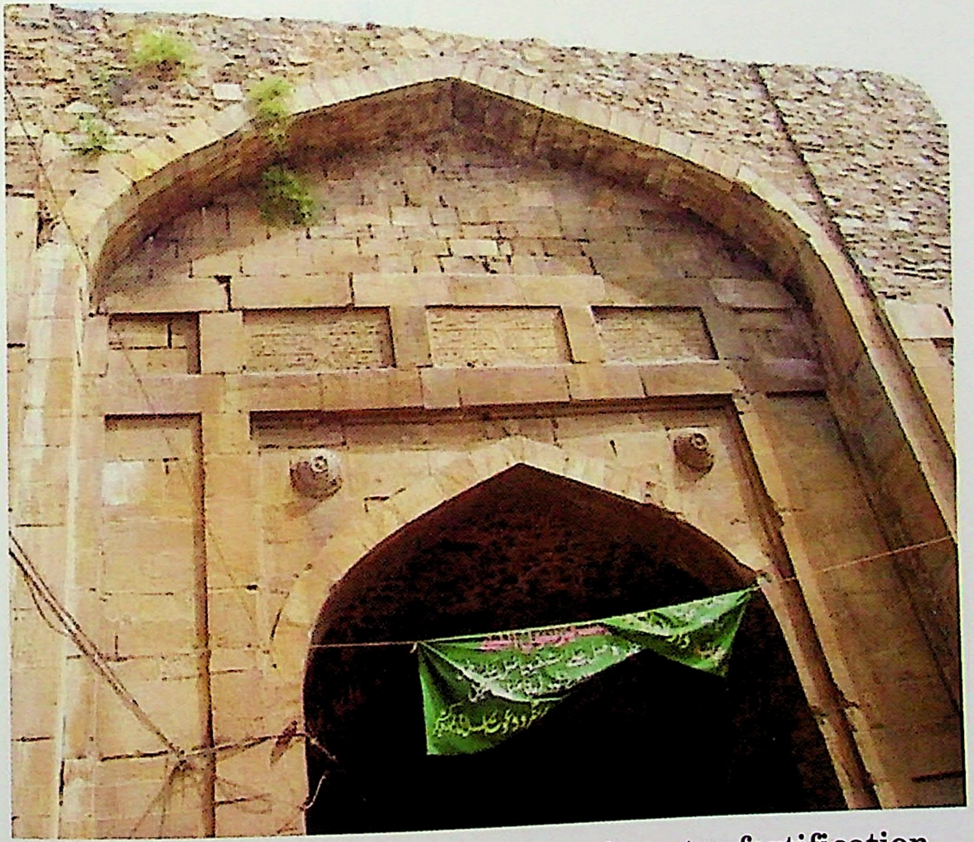
without any effort. The shrine and its springs have suffered total neglect after migration. The two springs, one in particular dedicated to Sun God /Lord Surya; devotees would take bath in these springs on various occasions. The spring that lies within the sanctum of the temple dedicated to Goddess Durga, is rectangular in shape, nearly three to four yards deep has the nector continuously oozing out of it throughout the year.

Sitting inside the temple on floor made of stone slabs and opting the western side of spring with eyes facing sun and the Image of Goddess Durga in a casket in front, is enough that one can ask for while seeking the heavenly bliss. Obviously, this had been the most favourite place of worship for Krishna's grand father. Krishna says that there used to be jagrans, services and discourses on Saturday nights during his time and even up to the migration, night jagran would start only after recitation of Panchastavi earlier by Krishna's grand father.The surviving members of the Mandli say that he had a melodious voice and once he started there would be a pin drop silence.



Pokherbal and Surya Springs within the premises of Pokherbal temple

Early next morning grand father would leave for home but not before purchasing bread from Muslim baker for feeding the stray dogs. Krishna would take great pleasure in feeding puppies. Vegetable wanderers would be lined up on each side up to Kathi darwaza and grand father would usually purchase fresh vegetables from them. After passing through a big stone Gate, Known as Katethe Darwaza, (Like other two gates; Baachi darwaza and Sangeen darwaza), all constructed by the King Akbar, as an entrance or exist to once floursbing city within, under the name of Nagar Nagar,(Earlier the new city of Srinagri was laid down by Parvarsena, adjacent to the place, where Ashoka had built capital city of Old Srinagri at Pandrenthan/ Purandsithna.) fortified by two stone walls /kallis, the inner one still in existence to some extent, while the ruins of exterior wall are rarely visible. The gate has a stone inscription at the top, which is said to have been installed at the instance of King Akbar himself,



Katehe Darwaza , one of the gates in outer fortification, built by Moghul King Akbar as an entry to the city within

*Once out of the gate, there is another holy place, known as Chaati Pathchahi, a Sikh gurudwara, where people believe sixth Sikh Guru, Guru Har Gobind Singh Ji, after following the Mughal road, via Shalimar in pulwama, visited the valley and had a stay in this Gurudwara. A famous incident connected with Guru Ji is narrated here. One Bhai Kotu Shah wished Guru Ji to visit his house. As he left his home for making normal domestic purchases, he took some Kradis/ dried cheese cakes in a piece of cloth, thinking that he might meet Guru Ji on his way. He did meet a man, who asked him if he had kept something special to offer to one, he respected the most. The man replied that he had preserved Kradi, for his Guru. The traveller was feeling hungry, he begged for some cakes out of the karadi wrapped in a piece of cloth. But the man categorically refused to part away with these. When Bhai Kotu Shah reached his home, he found Guru ji waiting there, who was none other than the traveller, he had met in the market place. Guru Ji did ask for the Karadi, but Kotu Shah could not dare to offer the cakes which by then had become feeding place for thousands of worms. Guru Ji told Kotu Shah that the traveller was more important then Guru and by refusing to accede to his request, he had committed a sin and spoiled the cakes as well. Thus goes the importance of the place, for Sikh baradari. On Sundays, Krishna, as a child sometimes used to enjoy halwa and puri at the Gurudwara gates.



Chatti Pathshahi Sikh Gurudwara near Katehe Darwaza

Prabhat-pharie devotees used to disperse at this spot, in various directions, of-course, after taking a brief rest at a place within the Katehe Darwaza. The last phase of the morning Parikrama would start from here on the opted routes. Krishna's grand father would take the shortest route through Malkha, which ran parallel to another path within Kallie. The two paths along either sides of Kallie separating Nagar-Nagar from Malkha, -inner-one leading back to Mukdoom Sahib's Shrine and the outer through Malkha to Gojwara with a turn at the Asthan/ Shrine of Bahudin Sahib, the description of which has already been given in the beginning of the Parikrama. It was the route usually taken by the devotees from down town areas. While other groups after leaving Chatti pathchahi, either followed the main road leading to Rainawari with a turn at Kamla Nehru hospital and proceeding towards Vital Bharva for offering prayers before final culmination of morning prikrama; However, some would visit Dasgheer Sahib's Shrine, while some passed through a small lane on other side of Malkha to reach Jamia Masjid and from there



Mungal Raz Barva at Babdem Near Baghi-Dilawar Khan School Srinagar

they would proceed to Haba-Kadal and adjoining areas. Yet another group would move across Malkha and stop at a place dedicated to Bharva, from where they would move into a lane leading to Naqash

Bandh Sahib's Asthan with Sheheed Mazar in its close proximity, a burial place of those slain protesters, who on 13th July, 1931, while defying law, had tried to break open the central Jail and consequently fell to the bullets of the state forces, the details leading to this episode shall be covered in following chapter.

(Malkha is a big piece of land with pits and peurs here and there, the biggest grave yard spread over large portion of the land from Rainaware to Gojwara). Krishna and his grand father after reaching Gojwara would move either via Badi Masjid/ Jamia Masjid to Saraf Kadal or through Islamia school lane to Rajouri Kadal and thence to their home at Nawa Kadal. Devotees from Haba-Kadal would at times follow Sheheed Mazar- Khanyar – route for paying their respects to great sofees at the Zeyaratghas of Naqishband sahib and Dasgheer Sahib respectively. These Zeyarat ghas are situated in proximity. Meantime, devotees from upper parts of the city would take routes that were distance-wise suited to their residential areas. Some would even visit Mungal Raz Bharva on their way, especially on auspicious occasions. The shrine is situated on a nearby island, to be exact, on the waters of Babdem/ Brarie Deva, dedicated to Mungal Raz, a local deity of the people from Fethekadal to Sathu Barbershah. The place would attract young and old because of the unique location similar to that of Vital Bharva. It offered chance to worship, have entertainment on kishti/ boat and also an occasion for a good feast. Babdem/ Brarie-Deva, in-fact, is an offshoot of Dal Lake. After implementation of Mar plan; it has been reduced to a small dirty pond of mud and stagnant water full of weeds.

Krishna had made up his mind to visit the Shrine of Dasgheer Sahib. He has a summarized account to narrate on the great saint which follows next.

Chapter IV

Historical Importance of Some Muslim Shrines

The devotees on their return from Hariparvat would sometimes pay obeisance at the Zeyaratgah of Hazrat Abdul Qadir Jeelani (Geelani) Rehmat utlahi Allah. They would bow at the shrine of this pious soul from Jeelan in great reverence, irrespective of their religious affinity. In-fact visit to this place would give them the feel of ecstasy. Young couples having no issue or those expecting the arrival of first child would seek saint's blessings. Krishna attempts at presenting some anecdotes concerning the life of Syeed Abdul Qadir, whom devotees know by various other names including Sayeed Gousia Aazam, Kahnovee and Dasgeer/ Dastgeer Sahib. (Courtsy, by a local acquaintance) Some extracts taken from an Urdu booklet on Gousia Aazam, were translated for inclusion, which provide a deep insight into the character of this elevated soul. Dastgeer sahib was born on (Awali Ramzan-ul-Mubark, barozeh Jumaah), first of Ramzan-ul-Mubarak, Friday, in 470 Hejeri/ 1075 A.D in Jeelan. He belonged to a very pious family. His father, Hazrat Sayeed Abu Salha Mousa/ Jangi Doost, loved Jehad. He had complete control over his sense organs and possessed ability to curb all types of hungers. He considered the characteristics of self-containment, self-discipline and self contentment the essential requirments for pursuing the path of spirituality. Jangi Doost once took to fasting for quite some time. A stage reached where he felt that he should taste some food. But, then, he put a question to himself; how had hunger overpowered him. Before, he could muse over the cause of this irresistible state of his mind and stop it from reacting, Hazrat Khazer Alayi Islam appeared before him and told him that God had bestowed the title of Jangi Doost upon Hazrat Abu Salha and that he being Jangi's friend, was instructed to have an iftiyaar/dinner with him (Khazer Alayi). Hazrat Abu Salha Mousa in due course of time drank the ocean of wisdom and thus became the light of the day. He had Nikah in the prime of his youth with Syeedya Fatima, (Mother of Dasgeer Sahib). However, the matrimonial union of the noble couple was consequence of the great penance and hardwork. The following description would

narrate the beauty of the incident involving the union of two souls. Once, it so happened that Hazrat Abu Salah/ Salha was offering prayers at the river bank, three days had passed, since he had his last supper. He was feeling hungry. Suddenly an apple made its appearance over the surface of water and the water current helped it drift towards the river bank, where Hazrat Abu Salah Mousa had taken the seat. Uttering the word "Bismillah", he caught hold of the apple and ate it. No sooner did he finish eating the fruit; he sensed that he ought not to have taken the fruit without the permission of the owner. He felt that it was a breach of trust on his part. He stood up immediately, thrashed his clothes and left in search of the orchard owner. Oviously, he moved against the flow. After tiresome journey for days together, he sighted an orchard and also spotted the particular tree, from the branch of which the apple might have actually fallen. He enquired from the neighbouring people, the name of the orchard owner. He was told that it belonged to one Hazrat Abdullah Soomi, a well known Sakhi noble of Jeelan. He immediately presented himself before the owner of the orchard expressing his remorse at the sinful act that he thought he had committed by eating an apple that had probably fallen in to the river from the tree planted in Hazrat Abdullah's orchard. Sayeed Abdullah was a saint of highest order; he understood that the young man was not an ordinary soul, but a man of great virtues. In his heart of hearts, he had the longing to embrace him, but before doing so, he wanted to test his forbearance. He told him that he would assign him the job of watching his orchard for minimum ten years as penance and only then could he think of considering his case for granting mercy. Hazrat Abu salah atonce agreed to the commands of Hazrat Sayeed Abdullah and did what he was asked to do. Once ten year period was over, he was asked by Hazrat Abdullah whether he was ready to accept another challenge after his graceful success in his earlier test. He was told that he was to marry his daughter, who was deaf by ears, blind by eyes, with damaged sound box, tiny hand and crippled legs. Hazrat Abu Salah without considering the consequences of going into such a matrimonial alliance, agreed to the proposal without a moment's pause. Immediately thereafter, the Nikah took place. To the utter surprise of Hazrat Abu Salah, his bride turned out to be the paragon of beauty, highly virtuous, with all organs intact and perfectly modelled in all respects. Hazrat Abdullah had not used wrong attributes while describing the so called personality traits of his

daughter, Hazrat Sayeeda Amaljaziri Fatima. Hazrat Sayeeda had never been out of her home, she had never made wrong use of her hands. She could never see bad things happening, she never lent her ear to bad thoughts and she could never think of bad deeds. Thus, Hazrat Sayeed Abdul Qadir Geelani had the fortunes of having taken birth in such a pious and virtous family. He was a Sayeed, belonging to Saddat family, finding lineage to Hazoor Salah-u-allay Wasalam. His short name was Abu Mohmad, his title Mehboob Sajemi,/ Gausia Azaum. He was Arafat by virtue of his mother, being fourteenth decedent of the system of Hussaini lineage and eleventh from father's side of Hussaini system. Dastgeer Sahib became orphan at a very early age and therefore his mother had to stay in her maternal home along with the child. Thus, he came under the direct guidance of Hazrat syeed Abdullah. As a child he had no taste for games or extra-curricular activities.



Dastgeer Sahib's Ziyarat at Khanyar Raina-wari

He was fond of learning. Accordingly, he had to leave his place Geelan and to go to Bagdad for seeking knowledge. An incident of his truthful nature as a boy is worth description. His mother, while sending him off on a long journey, somehow nurtured an apprehension that there was no one to guide the young boy on crucial issues that

he may confront in day to day life. She decided to leave an important piece of advice for her son, who was going to be away from home soon. She told him whatever the consequences be, he should always have courage to speak the truth and never allow lie to override or overcome him. Some time later, he had to joined the qafilla (group of travellers) to Bagdad. All of them had a smooth journey up to Hamdan. But once they reached a lonely place at Turtuk, they were attacked by a horde of wild Kazakiz, led by a strong Kazaki named Ahmed Badi. The travellers from Geelan had not the sufficient strength to face Badi and his men. Kazakis looted them of all their belongings. It was only Hazrat Gausia Azam, who was left untouched, perhaps thinking that he was a little boy of no consequences. However, two of the dacoits had post-thought. They believed in losing no opportunity. One of them made a retreat, turned towards the boy and asked him, if he was having any money in his possession. The boy fearlessly replied that he had forty dinnars with him. The dacoit could hardly believe in what the child had said. By then second dacoit also joined his associate, he too made an enquiry in a similar fashion; while the child repeated the statement. The dacoits had a hearty laugh at the boy. They left for joining the other members. When they arrived at the meeting point, a place, where their chief was waiting for them, they narrated the incident concerning the boy in a most casual way. The chief ordered the two men to rush back immediately and trace the boy so that he could meet him personally. The two dacoits, without losing time, set out for locating the boy. After covering some distance, they finally caught hold of Dastgeer Sahib, who offered no resistance and followed them to meet their chief. The boy looked quite innocent, a dervesh in real sense. Sardar asked him if he had spoken the truth, concerning forty dinnars in his possession. The boy replied in afirmation and repeated that he had forty dinnars with him, which had been concealed in a sealing in the form of a patch tailored by his mother, on the inner side of his shirt. It surprised them all, when they found that the boy had been speaking the truth. The chief asked the boy who had taught him to be so truthful, fearless and straight forward. He replied that it was his mother. This episode had an instantaneous effect on the chief. It brought about so sudden a change in him that he started weeping bitterly. He not only returned the entire booty that he and his fellowmen had looted from the Qafilla, but also begged Dastgeer Sahib to grant him fogiveness. Thereafter, the qafilla from Jeelan reached Bagdad in complete safety. During

Dastgeer's stay in Bagdad, he had to face lot many problems. At times, he had to go without food for days together, but he did not leave his quest for knowledge. Abu Bakar Tamiri states that on one occasion after being tired of hunger, he set himself wandering in a mandi of Bagdad, where he chanced to find himself before a mosque. He went inside. Hardly had he taken his seat that a young man came in with the pieces of baked meat and bread and started eating in a corner of the mosque. Hazrat Gausia was feeling so hungry that with every morsel that the other man took, his mouth watered and he wished that he too had such tasty food to eat. But very next moment, he started cursing himself for allowing hunger to conquer his soul. Despite such feelings, he continued gazing at the man, who by chance caught sight of Gausia Asam and invited him to share meals with him. Hazrat refused at first, but the man insisted on, saying that he had to accept the invitation anyway. Gausia Azam asked the man how he could expect him to share the meals without paying for it. He replied that he was from Dalan and that he had to deliver eight dinnars to Hazrat Gausia, but he failed to trace him, till he himself became penury and when he faced extreme hunger, he breached the trust reposed in him by Hazrat's family. It was out of that money that he had purchased meat and food. Therefore, he himself was an unlawful guest and not the legal (rightful) host.

This way, Dastgeer Sahib had to pass through so many ordeals, but then every time it was followed by a miracle. There are lot many things to tell about this great saint, whose teachings as well as lofty character earned him respect throughout Muslim world, but Krishna has to curb his emotions and restrain the flow of his pen for obvious reasons of time and space. It may be added here that, probably, this saint never visited the vale in person. Dastgeer Sahib left for his heavenly abode in 531 Hejeri, but not before usual Gusol/ bath, followed by Namaz /Sajda, praying for the welfare of Muslims all over. Before concluding this summarized account on the life of Sayeed Gousia Azam, it would be appropriate to mention that he had for a long stayed away from the proposal of getting married, for he feared lest the married life may pose hindrance to his spiritual urge.

But, who can challenge the will of God. He sets the time for execution of each and every act. By Almighty's grace, time for solemnizing his marriage came and he had four wives in Nikkah. All of them were deeply in love with him and strange as it may seem,

these marriages in no way affected his quest for seeking the absolute truth. In fact, he continued to follow the righteous path as before despite worldly engagements. He became an embodiment of wisdom and his mere presence would kindle the darkest part of the space and would cure the diseased souls of their sins. He had twenty four sons and twenty nine daughters from four wives and it is said that every time a son was born to him, he would take the child in his arms and say that the child is dead so that he would have no worldly attachment in the times to come, especially, in the event of neonate's death. Evidently, it made no difference to him, when once, while engaged in the act of worshipping, he was informed about the death of one of his son. He is said to have continued the prayers without getting perturbed at all.

In his zeyart at Khanyar/ Dastgeer Sahib, Muslims celebrate his Urs with great religious fervor. The celebrations probably last for ten days, during which time there is a day and night Dorudkhani. In fact, Kashmiris call this religious event as Dastgeer Sahib's days. Hindus also have great faith in his shrine. They considered this place as Ganeshsthal. Devotees in desperation utter his name, for they are sure that mere utterance of his name would surely relieve them of their troubles.

From here one can visit places like Magaleshwar Bharva Asthapana, Jamia Masjid and Shah-I-Hamdan Sahib's Asthan all falling en-route for the yatris from Haba-Kadal area. After offering puja and bowing before Mangaleshwar Bharva, one can take the opportunity of visiting Jamia Masjid and have a feel of structural majesty of the place of worship.

Jamia Masjid: It is said that at one point of time one hundred and eight temples stood on the piece of land that now occupies the beautiful structure of Jamia Masjid. On the arrival of Buddhism in Kashmir, temples were converted into viharas, which gave a rectangular shaped structural base to it. Yet, again on revival of Brahmanism/Hinduism, without any change in the architect, viharas were re-converted in to temples. Later on with the emergence of Islam in Kashmir, the viharas-cum-temples became mosques, without much change in the architectural design. After 1403, the mosque bears a recorded or documented history. It was in this year that Sikandar-but-Shikan gave the shape to his dream model, by laying the

foundation stone of the Jamia Masjid. He ruled Kashmir from 1390 to 1414-15. Zaina-ul-Abidin also added to its aesthetic attractions. In 1479, fire destroyed the mosque, but Sultan Hassan Shah started reconstructing it with still greater splendor, but could not complete the project because of his untimely death.



Badi Masjid at Nite Srinagar

In 1620, during the reign of Jahangir, mosque structure once again got destroyed in a fire. Jahangir had the work on reconstruction of the mosque started in quite earnestness, which took nearly seventeen years for completion. The Mosque got destroyed third time in the fire incident in the year 1674. When Aurangzeb heard of this unfortunate incident, he is said to have enquired of in the first instance whether the chinars were safe, for he knew that the mosque could be built and rebuilt, but the mighty chinars, the creation of nature meant waiting for hundred years or more. He, however, ensured that the construction work of the mosque was completed within a stipulated period of three years. Since then, it has been repaired and restored to its original grandeur first by Afgan Kings, followed by Dogra rulers and later on in recent times by the first democratically elected government of J&K state, who took the job of renovating this monumental building immediately after taking over the reigns of the state Government.*

Krishna would prefer to take a route passing through Gojwara-Islamia school lane leading to Rajouri Kadal, Budgheer and then to Kawa-Dara, (Famous for Kawdari Hak-saag, a leafy vegetables, a poor man's specialty in Kashmir). So far as Budhgheer is concerned, it has been a centre of Buddhist culture and learning, a place that had immense importance during Buddhist period. But time has left little trace of what the place once stood for, except of-course the name. The lane via Islamia high school reminds us of the historical importance that Islamic educational centre has, for the role played by this institution in leading successful political movements against what the community calls as autocratic rule. Islamia school has been one of the few institutions of modern education, started by non-governmental agencies in pre-independence era, just to arrest the influence of western education introduced in the valley by Christian missionaries in those days. However, the role played by the missionary can hardly be undermined. The services rendered by them both in the field of health and education can not be left sight off. Mission hospital in Srinagar has perhaps the distinction of being the first modern Medical institution that served the poor masses, suffering from contagious and infectious diseases like small pox and cholera to chronic and terminating diseases as T.B and cancer. People say that the doctors of the missionary in absence of adequate facilities and sufficient tool kits necessary for proper diagnosis and clinical analysis, would at times, put their lives to great risks for the sake of patient care. Krishna's father once while narrating his childhood incidents, recalled the dedication of missionary people in the following words. A woman related to his mother had been taken seriously ill. She had to be shifted to Mission hospital, where a doctor on duty took a sample of her (patient's stool). Krishna's grand mother, who was to attend the patient, was accompanied by her little son, who happened to be an eyewitness to a scene. The little child saw the doctor placing a very small stain of stool on the tip of his tongue, which he threw off immediately in the next fraction of a second and then cleaned his tongue with some medicine. This doctor is said to have cured the said patient of the dreaded disease within days. The same doctor was seen bandaging and pumping out impure blood from the boils of patients, which normally gave foul smell and dreadful look. Though, this doctor had limited facilities available with him, yet his determination was so great that his dazzling face would automatically overcome the patient's despair. He would treat

hundreds of such patients with care. This can hardly be expected of present day doctors, who acquire technical education and expertise at the expense of poor man's blood and later on instead of serving him, fleece his skin? (Dogra King, lateron, established hospitals one each in Srinagar and Jammu.) Again, Kashmiris can never forget the services rendered by Great Bisco Shahib, member of British Christian missionary, who came to Kashmir, when people had yet to come out of the thick layer of ignorance, accumulated over the centuries of subjugation. People had little access to the developments that were taking place in rest of the world. They had their brains locked in the mist of uncertainties. Of-course, religious education existed both amongst Hindus as well as Muslims. The knowledge of Gulistan Boostan, number maths and some scholarship in Sanskrit and Persian literature was there, but common people had very little reach to vast richness of Sanskrit, Hindi Urdu, Persian and Arabic literature. It was at the instance of this great Christian that Kashmiris were introduced to the concept of modern education. It is said that Kashmiri pandits lived in such an orthodox social set up that it was unthinkable of them to wear leather shoes or play with a leather football/volleyball. Bisco Sahib made pandit students of his school to play with the leather ball and even forced them to wear leather shoes for which he might have faced lot of resistance. They say that when he collected and framed the group of students for a game of volley ball, Pandit students used long sleeves of their phirans instead of touching the ball directly with their hands. They entered into the ground with wooden sleepers or grass woven chapels, which made them, look like clowns. He made them understand the virtues of living in the openness. He was responsible for introducing the aquatic games. He even imparted training courses amongst his students so that they could be perfect in the art of swimming. He would organize cross country races on the waters of Dal and Wular lakes. It is said that prior to Bisco sahib's arrival, most of the Kashmiris would hardly dare to go a few steps down the river banks. Most of the Pandits would either fetch water in their pitcher or take bath on the shores called Yarbals or sprinkled water over their heads with their hands while standing on first or the second step. The way these people sprinkled water over their body and head understandably showed that they had an element of cowardice embedded in their body and mind on account of continued suppression that they had experienced at the hands of alien rulers. In order to

make the students bold, Bisco Sahib used to push them against the flow of the river. He also contributed in introducing cycling and athletics like long jumps, high jumps, gymnastics and last but not the least revival of hiking, thereby bringing in a new awakening in the minds of the people. In educational institution, different subjects used to be taught on the latest patterns, with English as the medium of instruction. He encouraged his students to have hiking/ trekking tours for better understanding of nature, though he was not the pioneer in this field, because Hindus were nature worshippers from very early times. Thus, enthusiastic people took a leaf from his educational set up and started first Islamic, Hindu and Sikh educational institutions in Kashmir. State Government had already set up schools like the one at DilawerKhanun Bagh, just opposite Mungal Raz Bharava temple. Islamia school, Hindoo School, D.A.V school, Hindoo College/ presently christened as Sri Pratap College Srinagar were established, to counter and protect the cultural and religious ethos from so called onslaught of the missionary movement in Kashmir. Before dwelling on the activities of contemporary social and political organizations that were born as a result of both refined and fundamental thinking; Shaheed Mazar has been opted for the description with a definite purpose.

NAQISHBAND SAHIB'S ZIYARAT, a shrine of immense importance, has been an epicenter of pre-independence political movements of Muslims in Kashmir. Maazari shooda lies within the compound walls of this shrine. The visit to this place is as important as describing the post—1931 history of Valley. There is no-doubt that the shrine of Nakishband Sahib impresses the visitor at the very first sight, because of its very monumental architect. The place has assumed an added significance following the happenings of 13th July 1931, especially, when it was decided to house Shaheed Mazar within its compound. Thus, the Shrine apart from having religious sanctity, reminds us of the so called begining of the political movement of the Muslim community in Kashmir. The Shaheed Mazar, for clarity of readers, is a burial place of the people who defied the state police and were killed subsequently in a firing incident that took place near central Jail on 13th of July 1931. The people in large numbers had gathered there to protest against the arrest of one Abdul Qadeer Khan Gazi, who according to one house boat owner, Muhamad Azim Thuman, was a young man in late thirties from Afghanisthan, having

come to visit Kashmir as a butler, in the employment of Col. Alford Butt, a British officer. Mr Butt was probably to stay in Kashmir at the instance of British Government.



Shaheed Mazar at Niyet

Around this time, Muslim leadership was being groomed to stand against the Dogra King. Mr. Butt had arrived alongwith his wife, children and the butler Abdul Qadeer. The family had hired a house boat named Patrica in Dal Lake on Zakura side. The owner of the house boat Mr. Abdul Khaliq Tuman, Mr.Mohd Azim Tuman's grand uncle, had the first hand information about the Butler as people say. Further, the sequence of events suggest that it was probably the result of the round table conference of 1930, held in the misty atmosphere of London, where a young enthuastic prince from Kashmir, Maharaja Hari Singh, one of the participants from the sub-continent, had made some unfavourable comments regarding British Raj in India. He was, perhaps, the only prince amongst all to have spoken in support of India's struggle for freedom by openly criticizing the repressive policies of British Rule in India. In fact, he had gone to the extent of holding them responsible for dividing the people on the basis of caste, creed, colour and religion. Quoting the prevalence of peaceful co-existence amongst the people of different religions within his kingdom, he had claimed that under his reign, even the lion and the sheep could be seen drinking water at the same bank. No wonder then that such a statement might have prompted the Britishers to show the young inexperienced prince his rightful

place. Thus, it was the start of an enactment of a wolf and a lamb story. The arrival of the likes of Col. Alford Butt and his family in Kashmir must have been part of this game, rather a step for tightening the ends of the rope round the Prince's neck. Since, the problems that confronted his kingdom that time included lack of financial resources and thus all prevading poverty compounded with a weak rather no military might worth the name that could stand the pulls and pressures of the mightiest power of that period. The innocence and inexperience of the prince in the field of politics added to the complexities and thus proved a favourable ground for exploitation of the innocent subjects, who were easily trapped into cobwebs of politics woven by the Britishers. It is in this perspective that we see a Muslim guy from Afghanistan, introduced to the people as a simple, zealous and God fearing man, who in order to show his religious bent of mind became a regular visitor to Dargah Sharif, particularly on Fridays the process that started immediately after his arrival. This gentle man with fish catching his hobby and cooking his profession is abruptly pushed on to the stage of politics by so called compulsion of the circumstances or as they like to call it a result of sentiments sproutting out of the feelings for the suffering of co-religionists. Now, think of a man, a foreigner with a status of a butler, getting so bold that he dares to call people from a particular community to rise in an open revolt against the ruler of the state. The story does not end here, for this enthusiast from unknown region of the world is allowed to continue his ferocious speech with words as piercing as nails and as poisonous as cobra's venom, that too before the assembly of all Muslim political think tank of that time. Undoubtedly this would not have been the utterance of a simple butler, but a man with a mission in disguise. Otherwise leaders of the stature of Moulvi Yousuf Shah, Sheikh Mohmad Abdullah and gallaxy of other star politicians with lot of political maturity would not have allowed situation to become uncontrollable. It had been a part of sinister design to contain the ruler from soaring high, a mission that favoured the ongoing anti-regime movement. It is for all to guess that such an incitement could not have gone un-noticed or neglected by the polity no matter how meek the ruling class might have been, more so, when the authority of the state was directly challenged. So far as hear say regarding descretion or disregard shown to the Holy book by a Dogra constable was concerned, there has been no confirmed source to authenticate the incident of incitement that caused the

collective rage. How this great enthusiast, Abdul Qadir became a protagonist and created a room for himself in the political circles, that embolden him to move through the packed gathering and share the dais without his status and identity being questioned by the organisors, is no less than a riddle. Such display of valour by a foreigner can hardly be expected of a simple butler.

As regards hearsay, there are instances, where holy book has been exploited. One such instance took place in the year 1967, when Kashmiri pandits had resorted to an agitation demanding return of a girl, who had allegedly been forced to enter into wedlock with a Muslim guy, probably due to economic reasons. Since, pandits were not ready to digest this sort of humiliation that time. It had greatly hurt their ego and had made them feel that their identity was being eroded and that they were being marginalized under a definite scheme. Sometime earlier they had been humbled by an enactment of land to tillers, without making compensation to the owners.

This was followed by reservation in Government jobs and seats in professional and educational colleges/ institutions and then delimitation which virtually snatched pandits of their right to have even a single representation in state assembly, which was done by engineering a division/segmentation of the areas dominating pandit votes and readjustment of the areas in such a way as to leave them with no chance of putting up even a single candidature of their choice. Therefore, pandit community was justified for framing their opinion on the State Government and its rule of goverance. They had started feeling that unless they showed some sort of resentment; their community may further be cut to size. Awaiting for a chance to give vent to such feeling, the conflict that rose because of inter-caste marriage, provided them the much awaited opportunity of starting an agitation, which got the whole hearted support of the entire community. The agitation continued for weeks despite police excesses in the form of lathi-charge, use of tear gas and firing causing number of death, the resistance thus offered was quite unexpected of the people who had never known the experience of coming on to the streets. When government started feeling helpless in suppressing their peaceful agitation, they resorted to the means that could easily curb and contol the volatile situation besides silencing the voice of this particular section of society once for all, leaving no room for them to raise their heads in future. Though the agitation was still

gaining momentum with the demands getting attention and support of other like-minded sections, who had also been feeling suffocated, because of continued policy of neglect, the movement could have yielded results, but unfortunately, some hearsay incident of disrespect to religious book floated by the people in Govt. and the opposite camp, followed by the creeping in of the corrupt elements amongst the community leaders in the fray, stabbed the community at the back, pandits soon got drifted away by the air of confidence, allowing the inclusion of such issues in their agenda that directly clashed with interests of the majority community in the valley and thereby spoiling the entire effort. It is true that pandits had not reconciled to the change and had failed to keep up with the pace of changing scenario. Perhaps, they were feeding on false notion that they had some body at their back, who would never allow a disgrace to tri-colour, which they thought had been handed over to them as the trustworthy bodyguards/ guardians totally misled by their unimaginative and unrealistic approach, they felt dismayed, when the people they relied upon, not only ignored them, but also made them to realise that they were of no consequence to them and that they should know where they stand, the early the better. For country of India's size and population with vast religious and social diversity, ignoring the interests of majority community in an area as sensitive as Kashmir was not feasible in a so called secular India, that too, for the sake and safety of one comparatively smaller community with absolutely no ballot power, no matter how justified and valid the minority claims had been. These people should have known that democracy had not reached the stage, where individual interests could mean as important as the collective interests of the nation or atleast, at par with those who have administrative key with them, further, because of their rigid approach and inherent traits, like for instance, sticking to white collar jobs or craving for admission in professional and educational institutes, despite prevailing unfavourable conditions, pandits had but hastened their steps towards Jawahar tunnel. Especially, the youth felt suffocated and they wanted a change that could ensure them to breathe in a free and fresh air. Whether the change they opted for lateron was good or simply offered them better living opportunity, has still to be assessed in totality. But they were generally led to believe that the role of elected state Government had never been that of seeking prosperity for all. Obviously, they felt no more than second class citizens, while the post-migration period,

did, atleast, provide them the opportunity to live without any fear or bias. Therefore, it is obvious that the out break of the Militancy in late1989 had given a last push to those, who had already reached at the periphery and were waiting just to take a step forward. In fact, its rehearsal had started as early as in 1947, 1953 followed by agitation in 1967 and then the alarming signal of 1986, when Qazi Nisar from Anantnag forcibly entered the Gotam Nag premises and claimed the land and property of the Shrine as waqaf property, which resulted in the wholesale destruction of hundreds of temples and houses belonging to particular community. Houses were burnt, property destroyed and looted. Strange but true that no body tried to pacify the situation and the agreived ones were left to themselves as if they were no longer needed and that their presence was an eye sore. Even then the pandits tried to hold the roots one way or the other.

But from there onwards they stood at the threshold of the sleeper where from it was a simple thrust, a push that could throw them out, which was given a practical shape when militancy broke out in 1989. The indiscriminate killing of kith and kin of pandits in hundreds in a broad day light accompanied by loot and destruction of their property and subsequently branding them as mukhbirs, finally, led to the mass exodus of these unfortunate people.

The demands that only the merit and not the religion /or majority based reservation as criteria for allotment of seats in professional colleges or in regard to the appointments against Government jobs, raised as early as in 1967 agitation, had not only landed pandits into the trouble then, but had its far reaching consequences for the community in times to come. The Muslim community, which had so far been witnessing the processions and protests with amusement, playing the role of mute spectators, had found a valid reason, of-course, at the instance of numberless well wishers at the helm of affairs to stop pandits from going further in their demands. In-fact, pandits were now to be shown their righful place. The elements interested in stopping pandits from getting anything tangible, put both the state and Central Governments under extreme pressure. Subsequently, they resorted to the already tested tactics (viz; that of spreading hearsay regarding the disrespect shown to holy book as had happened earlier, during the episode of 13th July1931, surely a viable weapon to provoke the majority community in the valley).

Thus, Pandits had not only to eat the humble pie, but were also to lose their voice for ever. This disaster finally pushed them to the edge and thus ensured their exit from the valley within next two decades.

The purpose of narrating this incident has been to lay emphasis on the fact that masses get easily exploited on certain touchy issues. Now, had it not been for probing the traits of a man called Abdul Qadeer, the above topic would not have come under discussion. Imagine a man, holding a knife in his hand, which they say he had brought from Mr.Butt's house-boat pantry; sets himself for joining religious congregration at Shahi-Hamdan Sahib's shrine, where people had gathered in thousands. Qadeer Sahib takes a suitable place in the multitude, sits amongst them and then all of a sudden finds an entry straight on to the dias without any reservation or resistance from the organizers. People say that the leaders on the dias included Khawaja Saad-ud-din shawl, Mirwaiz Moulvi Yousuf Shah, Mirwaiz Mujahid Hamdani, Chaudary Ghulam Abbas, Agha Sayyid Hussain Shah Jalali, Khawaja Ghulam Ahmed Asahai, Munshi Shahb-ud-Din, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, Sardar Gohar Rehman and other selected respesentatives of Kashmiri Muslims besides illuminaries, who later on stood either by Sheikh Abdullah or parted their ways with him. All these leaders might have been there to hear and be heared, but only the young man in Mr. Qadir steals the show. Going by the text of the speeches by Sheikh Mohmmad Abdullah and the one made by Abdul Qadeer Khan, who by now had let the people know that he (Mr.Qadir) was a follower of Islamic ideologue Maulana Jamaluddin Afgani, lead the observers to the conclusion that there must have been some latent force/ a hidden hand behind all this. The occasion and the place must have been chosen to make the presence felt amongst the leaders of divergent political views, who had been forced by circumstances to share a single Dias. So far as the Maharaja's rule from 1925 to 12th July, 1931 is concerned, there has been no single reference that can point towards an abuse of power or misrule on his part. Infact, he was very sincere by heart, secular by character and a man of scientific temperment. Even his critics would be ready to acknowledge that he must have been the first amongst few princes to understand the importance of universalization of the Education. He had even made primary education compulsory. He got the schools opened all over

the state, which were more often called as Jabri zaach, schools where teachers had to motivate the children for learning the knowledge of Rs. 3. After the death of Maharaja Partap Singh in 1925, when Hari Singh ascended the throne, in his maiden speech, he declared that though he was born to practise Hindu dharma, as a ruler, it would be his dharma/duty to do justices to all, irrespective of caste, colour, creed or religion. He knew that his subjects were living in complete ignorance because of almost zero literacy rates, which he thought was the root cause of all evil including poverty. With limited resources available, his budget hardly permitted him to shape his dreams well. However, he was responsible for opening of educational institutions and health care centres at all important places and it surely goes to his credit to have encouraged and helped missionaries to run health care centres and hospitals for the betterment of his subjects. Had Britishers left him alone, he would have proved the most successful ruler. Unfortunately, right from 1931 to the last days of his reign, he was made to feel helpless.

The 1931 uprising is considered by some as the land mark in the social and political history of Kashmiri Muslims. Professor Noor Ahmad Baba thinks that the uprising had proved to be the first organized and sustained political mobilization against a system that according to him had pushed almost entire Muslim population in to a position of exclusion and disadvantage in almost all spheres of social, political and economic life. He adds that looking from this perspective, the uprising in Kashmir was neither sudden nor un-related to the happenings in Indian sub-continent and in rest of Asia. His analysis of the 1931 episode, suggests that the emancipative forces, were already at work in Kashmir. He goes back to Shawalbaab agitation in 1865, establishment of the first Muslim school in1889 and the subsequent transformation of the initiatve into a movement in the form of Anjumani Nusrat-ul-Islam, which had a reformist agenda(1905) that provided Kashmiri Muslims the leadership on a number of issues, especially, problems concerning the community. Further, the formation of Anjumani Hamdardan-I-Islam in Srinagar during world war, with the objective of ameliorating the conditions of Kashmiri Muslim, the silk factory workers agitation in 1924 and other such actions and incidents that according to him had become reflective of growing awakening and agitation of Kashmiri Muslims against policies of Dogra regime. He also refers to the submission of

memorandum to the viceroy of India in 1924 by some prominent Kashmiris, highlighting the problems and disadvantages that only Kashmiri Muslims suffered from and thus soliciated their redressal. According to him, the internal & external developments within India and in rest of Asia, in particular, with regard to Muslim world, had resulted in the extension of the colonization deeper within Muslims and then the breakdown of the Ottoman Empire during world war I and consequent fragmentation of Arab Islamic world, almost the entire middle-east, had been overtaken by the imperialist forces, viz: Britan and France, which had left deep imprints on the body politics of the Muslim world. Thus, the reformist and anti-colonial ferment which later took the shape of movements in North African Muslim states like Sudan, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Libya and then the emergence of young turks (1908), Muslim brotherhood in Egypt and earlier on Wahabis movement and its influence on India and Kashmir in particular, followed by Wafd in Egypt, Bathist socialist brand of Arab nationalism in Lebanon with Pan Arab agenda had all played an important role in Muslim world. Now after all this inference, he concludes that one of the prominent persons who turned out to be of an institutional significance in himself and possibly the most influential Muslim activist with an anti-colonial and reformist agenda had been Mr. Jamalluddin Afgani and there is hardly any significant Muslim country that did not have the imprints of his influence. This is where the secret appearance of Abdul Qadeer Khan on the political scene of Kashmir lies. While within Arab world, persons like Mohammad Abdahu and Rashid Raja carried forward Afgani's reformistic agenda, in Indian sub-continent it was Iqbal, who was immensely influenced and inspired by Afgani's ideas. In the context of Indian sub-continent, Iqbal was probably the single influential thinker, with strong anti-colonial reformist and emancipative message. According to Iqbal, no man had stirred soul of Islam more deeply than Jamal-ud-din. And thus his ideas surely have had tremendous influence on the political environment of Kashmir, the colonial forces against whom his movement was initially targeted, had well succeeded in channalizing the influence of the movement to where it could do them less harm while benefit them the most. Therefore, it is not difficult to access, what this struggle was for in context to Kashmir? Who was the target? Who fought and with whom and why? Was it a movement for re-organization of Islamic rule or else was a struggle for freedom of people from autocratic regime? In

real terms it was the politics of convenience and not the politics of principles? The greatest exodus and bloody wars would not have taken place, had these struggles been fought for the cause of common people in general. People talk of principles only when they are directly punched, while they forget and ignore the essence of these very principles, when they are in a commanding and advantageous position.

It is true that the developments within India in late 19th and early 20th century had a direct bearing on Kashmir. Tehreeki Mujahidin of Sir Syed Ahmad, Sheedh foundation of Devband and Aligarh Muslim University or the establishment of movements like Ahalihadis strengthening the khilafat movement in India, the activitities of which even made in roads into Kashmir as well. Thus all these developments had influenced intellectual personalities amongst Kashmiri Muslims. Some of these intellectuals believed that the influence of Punjab press and in particular the concern of Kashmir Muslim diaspora settled across northern India in general and Punjab in particular, can hardly be underestimated. People like Allama Mohmmad Iqbal , Sonaullah Amritsari, Mohammad Din Fauq, Saifuddin Kichloo and host of others had been working tirelessly to awaken the Muslims of Kashmir and had formed a forum in 1896 named Anjumanan-i-Kashmiri Muslamanan Lahore, later to be replaced by All India muslim Kashmiri conference. Thus, one can draw inferences from following lines.

Was it Muslims fighting against non-Muslims or just a fight against an alien ruler, a Hindu raja from Jammu region? If Jammu were to be treated as part of the state, then Maharaja was not an alien ruler, at the most his yoke could have been termed as an autocractic and the struggle should have been for installation of an elected ruler instead of branding it a struggle against foreign ruler occupying territory of Kashmir, which could have gained strength in other regions as well. The fight should have been on behalf of all the people of the entire state against one man's rule and not against any particular religion or region, for if these were the parameters, then the Hindus of the state too had been under the subjugation of Muslim autocratic rule for centuries and had suffered heavily on this account, but hardly had any enthusiastic Muslim termed it as foreign occupation or subjugation by ruthless rulers, probably, it was because it involved rule by co-religionists. The fact that, Muslim rulers

invaded and plundered everything that was indigenious to Kashmir and Kashmiri ethos and later on settled to claim the propriety rights of the land on the analogy of earlier Aryan settlements. It appears that the principles governing this type of politics implied raising a demand, designed only for a particular section of the society. Otherwise, democracy can never empower an elected representative to be led by the consideration of religion or region? An impartial approach, if not always but at some stages, is necessary to administer justice. Biased approach only widens the gap. It is always in the interests of the people to resist the tendency of falling prey to such a mind-set and in-fact, such inclinations should firmly and resolutely be done away with. Other-wise also, nature is a great care-taker; it comes to the rescue of the helpless in one way or the other. One Muslim brother, who belonged to the place that had given birth to one of the tallest political leaders of prior and post independence era of Kashmir, once told Krishna that this leader as Minister was once approached by his secretary with a merit list of the selected candidates for his approval, the perusal of the list indicated that toppers, bore the names of one particular community, it was only deep down the list that his eyes caught the sight of the candidates belonging to his own community, which quickly prompted him to direct the finance secretary that henceforth he should learn to follow the rule of forwarding the list of candidates in the ascending order of their merit and thus the practice was introduced for future just to suit the interests of one particular community. But then, he could not stop the aggrieved people from taking better assignments elsewhere, though it meant their displacement from their birth place for good. The validity of hypothesis that impartial and biased approach never leads to prosperity, can find better explanation in the history of present as well as past.

Truth is an absolute term. It can never have relative meanings, unless relative truth is created to suit one's interests. Concoted versions or manufactured truths, donot strike the cord always. People, who are influenced by radicalism or brought up in a fanatic atmosphere, have less ability to understand logic. To create conflicts is their basic job. They believe that waging holy wars are pre-requisite for ensuring seat in heaven. However, people with rational approach realise that war between the good and the evil continuously goes on within ones-self. The essence of waging holy war lies not in extending it beyond the contours of one's inner realm; but avoding bloody

conflicts through self-introspection, non-interference and inner purification, the essential traits that leave no scope for tension. Clashes deprive humanity of possible prospect of peace and tranquility. Nothing comes out of violence or gun-culture. It does not have an approval in a decent and civilized society either. After all people have the right to hold different view points. Those at the receiving end are sometimes genuine in asking for what the powerful majority may consider an infringement upon their rights. Perpetrators do adopt wolf and lamb approach for settling the scores, profess morality, but more-often, fail to display sincerity. To some even a newly born neonate is not worth forgiveness. It is to suffer for the sins supposedly committed by its fore-fathers. Under such circumstances, belonging to a faith or religion of one's ancestory at times proves no less than a curse. To ensure that justice is ultimately done, it is important to demonstrate a balanced approach. Most of the conflicting situations can be avoided by timely response to basic problem. Any attempt at minimizing the trust deficit should be appreciated. Otherwise, such feelings usually give rise to sense of deprivation, which is in no way good for the health of any modern society and may lead to the differences with far reaching consequences. Sometimes, things turn so ugly, especially, when the means of survival are denied, or narrowed down by caste, region or religion based considerations or life made so insecure that the sufferer is left with no other alternative but either to adopt the path of violence as Tamilians did in Sri-lanka or else be patient like pandits, who resigned to the situation and left valley for good under compulsion for they had no other choice except either to accept conversion or be trapped and get hacked to death. Miltants had already pronounced their decrees for sizeable number of their fellow-Hindus, whose execution was chosen arbitrarily to create panic. Having no state protection, hundreds of miniority members being already killed seeking safe passage at the earliest possible time, was the only option left with them. They cared least for the loss of their moveable and immovable property and surprisingly managed a slip almost in one go much against the wishes of the miltant groups. By the grace of God, these people saved their life and honour, leaving the executors of the violence in a state of absolute shock. The people behind all this mayhem are now carrying out a disinformation campaign. They come out with such rubbish argument that migration was not the only course left and that the then Governor ought to have detained

the migrants in camps near cantonment area, an impractical preposition, in view of the then prevailing situation. Going by the history of tragic incidents that followed, it is quite evident that the entire community would have met the horrible end. In-fact, the adversaries with a craving for seeing the complete annihilation of these people, had felt crestfallen when they misearably failed in their mission. Staying back in the valley in the environment of suspicion and facing terror would have been suicidal. Some people have paradoxically remarked and rightly so that the militants gave them better solutions to their age-old problems. It provided an opportunity for the oppressed class to break the shackles forever and refuse to bear the brunt anymore. The system had beyond doubt failed to appreciate the problems that the aggrieved people faced beyond doubt.

Thus, these people, as a matter of fact, are justified to raise the demand of homeland, of-course, with the help of saner people. The perpetrators are alarmed at the prospect of this minority community getting world wide support for creation of a separate homeland within the valley, which no force on earth can deny them.

Now back to 1931 uprising, any account on this subject, would be incomplete without the mention of people like Mohammad Din Fauq, who practically devoted his entire life to the cause of Muslim awakening in Kashmir, well before organized political movements began to take shape. Muslims should acknowledge the solidarity that well wishers from across the Northern India exhibited and extended on various occasions before and after 13th July, 1931. The details lead to the conclusion once again that the uprising which apparently appears to be as a consequence of the so called anti-Muslim policies or suppressive measures adopted by the Dogra regime as propogated by Muslim intelligentsia, in reality must have been the handiwork of the latent force at work, serving the purpose other than what has actually been presented before the general masses. So far as Reshim-Khana /Silk factory worker's agitation and its influence on the uprising in1931 is concerned, nearly 5000 Muslim wavers, who had reportedly gone on strike for their demand of hike in their wages in the year 1924, it is necessary to understand and appreciate the role of the state in running the silk factories, despite impediments like, obligation of enforcing trade policies favourable to British interests, poor revenue yeilds and the constraints due to social obligations. So far as the discrimination on the basis of religion or region is concerned,

the factory at Srinagar had been established keeping in view the area and the size of population. Though, such factory had also come up at Jammu but comparatively on much smaller scale. Going by the available sources of information, the purpose of establishing these factories by the govnment had never been to earn revenue or profits, but to provide bread and butter to those who were neither skilled nor semi-skilled. This labour class was generally unskilled and in certain cases bodily infirm/ disabled, with no other financial support to keep them alive. Even mentally retarded persons had also been adjusted against various jobs that suited their capacity. There is no denying of the fact that in absence of sophisticated machinery or better working conditions; most of the work in these factories was carried out manually. The poor workers had to put their fingers in boiling water or had to do even still more dangerous job, which would sometimes prove fatal as well. Therefore, life was not a bed of roses for the workers and for that matter of fact the hard toil these workers were putting in was not genuinely paid. But when looked from ruler's point of view, it definetely justified his position for there were hurdles like market restrictions, social obligations and un-sound financial position, otherwise the quality/ stuff that these factories produced, might not only have changed the destiny of the workers, but would have helped in enhancing reserves of the state treasury for growth and development of all. Outdated technologies, tough competition in the face of strong and established competitors, cost-wise ineffective out-put, had pushed these factories to the brink of bankruptcy. The total annual revenue earnings of the silk factories at Srinagar and Jammu were in no way adequate enough to bear additional burden either in the form of incentives or a hike that workers needed for their sustenance. Despite the fact that the demands had been genuine from various angles, but such a concession would have meant the closure of the factory and in turn leaving factory workers completely jobless all at once. The so called repressive policy of the state against the workers of a particular class is absolutely a false allegation, a mere propaganda and not the true depiction of facts. No-doubt, the king had no right to rule, if he could not provide two time meal to his subjects. He needed to be sacked immediately. But to exploit him just because he did not happen to be one amongst their co-religionists, can hardly be justified. Biased tendencies may label such a king as brutal and unjust, but sincere introspection reveals the truth other-wise. In the instant case, there were forces behind movements, who

were hell bent upon destabilizing the Dogra Raj in the state and that this strike might have been a rehearsal of the subsequent events that followed in 1931. Fifty nine years prior to 1924, the agitation of shawl weavers in1865 had made their strongest protest against revision in taxes imposed by Maharaja Pratab Singh, which led to a hoisting up of list of demands, including the abolition of the monthly tax of Rs 2/- on each loom. Muslims of Kashmir do consider it as the beginning of the so called struggle against an alien rule. No sane ruler would force his subject to pay tax out of nothing. Yet, for running the affairs of the state, a king is essentially in need funds, thus imposition of taxes is one of the means to enhance revenue resource, which in normal practice only a few are willing to pay. Parting with the money or paying taxes voluntarily, is a difficult preposition, no matter how much money one might earn. There is a tendency to increase the profit volume without wishing to share it with others and therefore, it sometimes becomes imperative for the state to take stringent measures for tax collection purposes. The tragic incident of Zaldager must have been the result of people tasting the fruit without footing the bill to the sellers. Raj Kak Dhar, a tax collecting official, is believed by muslims, to have instigated Dewan Kripa Ram, the then Governor of Kashmir against the weavers, which could not have been the only reason for the protest, there were other valid reasons which people obviously understood but were not ready to express. Movement can not be ackowleged as mass movement when sizeable section of the population is out of it? Clash of interests can at times be a cause of conflicts, you cannot expect people to show mercy when you prove weak or when you lose the game and make free use of a sword when you are strongly poised. Such thinking usually leads to an ultimate failure, for circumstances may change with changing times, so do the positions, servants sometimes prove mightier than the masters. It is a general perception that pandits during Dogra Raj enjoyed dignified positions. But the slight perusal of this brief chapter of history would reveal that only few pandits were the part of bureaucracy, of-course a small section of them constituted a class of lower rung officials more loyal to the crown than the king. This group worked mostly as office clerks, peons, Mahaldars, guards, patwaris, Girdawers, accountants or munshis and so on. They would excel as experts in these fields, because they had the quickness of fingers, depth of sight, sensitive nose, ears alert, sweet coated tongue and of-course, the forbearance of a donkey, who

consumed paper without actually eating it. Tricks of the trade taught them to be past masters in displaying self-importance, not so good approach that made them an eye sore amongst other competitors. A Rakha attached more importance to himself than a divisional forest officer, which is evident from the following phrase" Allah tumko Rakha banayaa", a Gojar expressing his gratitude to D.F.O. But then all pandits should not be blamed for so-called negative traits of a few. Some times, even the circumstances teach one to be so, especially, when one has had an up-bringing under foreign yoke which lasted for centuries with constant threat of being wiped off by the tremors. There are instances where a man pushes his own child under his feet to hold ground or gain the safe height. No wonder then that some of the traits like timidness, false ego and self serving attitude were imbibed by certain individuals prior to Dogra rule and during the times that followed.

Coming back to the speech of Mr. Abdul Qadeer, which he made on 25th June, 1931 and for which he was arrested under section 124-A and 153 of the penal code, it becomes clear that something was being cooked in the shades. So far as promoting the ratings regarding scene of his arrest is concerned, the owner of the house boat, in which Mr. Qadeer was residing, had made known that one unidentified person asked for Mr. Qadeer in the evening. He came out and rowed the shikara himself alongwith the man, probably, from state intelligence wing, deputed to arrest Qadeer at the banks of the Dal Lake. When Col. Alford's wife came to know about it, she rushed to the spot and asked the soldiers to set Mr. Qadeer free at once. Upon showing warrant of arrest, Alford's wife kicked the soldiers, but they were unrelenting. On 4th July, his trail started in the court of the session judge Srinagar. Four hearings were held up to 9th July, perhaps the first political trial, which attracted Muslim sympathizers. It was perhaps the then political leadership who wanted the trial to be blown out of proportions so that they could exploit the the situation for promoting their political interests. Obviously, Government had to take all precautionary steps. Maulvi Abdullah Vakil was the only lawyer, who took the job of defending this case. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, in his speech from Jamia Masjid, Srinagar on 10th July, 1931, told people that Abdul Qadeer had been prosecuted for the cause of Islam in general and Kashmiri Muslims in particular. As a matter of fact all other communities were left out with no role to

play in so called struggle for self rule. Adopting secular tone was an after thought, a realization that must have been drawn on some saner elements in the leadership but not before the start of negotiations on merger of state with India, when Muslim conference was renamed as National conference. But both the sides knew what it actually meant. Earlier on, in a speech, Mr Qadeer had asked the Kashmiris Muslims to prepare themselves for the supreme sacrifice for the sake of Islam and not specifically for the entire population of State. On 13th July, 1931, D.I.G with one inspector, two sub-Inspectors, five head constables and forty four policemen arrived at the spot, out of which twenty two policemen were reportedly armed with rifles and rest with clubs, of-course the Inspectors had also the revolvers with them. The jail staff consisted of 119 policemen in all, who were armed with bamboo canes and a few had rifles as well. Since large number of Muslims had gathered on the road leading to jail compound. Prior to the arrival of the session judge, the D.I.G wanted the people to get dispersed, but they insisted that they be allowed to offer Namaz-e-Juma (Friday prayers) at the place. Police arrested five men and this incensed the people. One Khawaja Abdul Kaliq Shora started reciting Azan and was reportedly shot dead. This incident was enough to agitate and enrage the people that had gathered there and ignite the situation thus. They took to stone pelting.This reportedly followed three rounds of firing by police at the behest of magistrate on duty. Police arrested 32 persons initially. Meantime, cavalry forces also arrived. For avoiding escalation of violence, they wanted the temporary custody of the dead bodies, but people confronted this act by proceeding towards Jamia Masjid. The wounded were carried to nearby hospitals (Mission hospital at Rainawari and the private clinics belonging to one Dr. Abdul wahid as reported by some of the demonstrators). In all eleven persons died as per the Govt. reports, while local sources held that 22 deaths had occurred with six more in the police action while dispersing the ire-mob, responsible for looting and plundering the entire commercial hub in Maharaj-Gunj, falling under Zaina- Kadal area of Srinagar city, predominantly owned by Dogras, Punjabi Khatris and some Kashmiri pandits. Eye witness to this mob furry, stated that big shops containing goods worth crores of rupees were looted, owners and employees were mercilessly beaten and even some people killed and thrown in to river Vitasta, which included a pandit lady and an old man. People say the market looked deserted for weeks together. Roads covered

with thick layers of turmaric and other spicy powders were left uncleaned till it mixed with dust. Looters were seen carrying looted material, comprising of bundles of costly cloth, crockery, shoes and almost all other items of daily use on their backs as well as in their hands. Crore-pati businessmen were reduced to penury over-night. Even their houses were not spared. The entire community by and by shifted their business establishments to Maharaj Bazar at Hari Singh high street. Those, who were killed in police firing, were laid to rest in the compound besides Naqishband Sahib Shrine near Jamia Masjid, where leaders like Mir-Waiz-i- Kashmir, Molvi Muhamed Yusuf shah, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and all other prominent leaders gave farewell to the departed souls. It was Khawaja Noor Shah who suggested this place for burial. It was followed by week long hartals. Muslim youths tried to shout slogans against Maharajas from their roof tops, while police started policing these elements. Thus, emergence of most powerful leaders like Sheikh Abdullah and Molvi Yusuf Shah on the political scene became inevitable. Sheikh Abdullah was soon conferred the title of Sher-i-Kashmir by his followers.

Maharaja had great difficulty in curbing this upsurge. He had to make certain changes in his administration. He appointed pandit Hari Krishen Koul as the new Prime Minister of the state. Orders were issued for release of political prisoners except Abdul Qadeer Khan Ghazi, who was given five years rigious imprisonment. A compromise was reached between Maharaja and the leaders of Kashmiri Muslims through the efforts of Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad at a public meeting in Jamia Masjid. Most of the Muslims were not in favour of the decision taken by Sheikh Sahib. These people thus started cursing and criticising him. Molvi Yusuf Sahib accused him of compromising against the sacrifices of the martyrs. However, both of them assured the people in their speechs that they will be last to betray their faith and promised that their agitation shall resume in the event of Maharaja failing to redress the grievances of the people.The question arises, whether Muslims were the only people in Kashmir, who were disadvantageously placed under the combined colonalisation of Dogras and Britishers? For when we talk of composite culture, we have to go by the thinking that reflects composite view point, which means concern for all. Whether state's accession to India has been just and legal, is a subject of great debate

and it is neither possible to deliberate on such issue here nor is this the intention either. However, it definitely provides the opportunity to refer to Pt. R.C.Kak's solution of making the pre-partitioned, State of Jammu & Kashmir, in to a kind of a buffer state, which had no takers that time. Since, great people are great because their deeds and words carry weight. But at times they also commit mistakes, which prove quite devastating. While, great leaders may or may not change the destiny of all concerned, yet the consequences of their blunders have to be borne by all, for their acts more-often determine the destiny of all the stake-holders. More often after-effects of wrong judgement make not only the leader or the community he belongs to, but the people in general to suffer. Muslims in Kashmir have been most fortunate in this regard, because their leadership always displayed vision and made calculated moves, which favoured them enormously. Kashmiri Muslims had reposed their confidence in the leadership that later on gave nod to the state's merger with rest of India. Whether willingly or otherwise, whether these people supported the move openly or not, a thorough assessment without any exaggeration reflects that the decisions these Muslim leaders took, were not at all detrimental, imperfect or faulty as muslims of extremist views project. Otherwise they would not have been in such an advantageous position that they are enjoying at present. Probably, they would not have dreamt of becoming economically so sound and prosperous, literally so advanced and enlightened and even politically so alert and awakened in comparison to their counter-parts in rest of the continent, that too in a short span of fifty years.The preferential treatment that majority community in Kashmir receives makes their counterparts in other states really envious. Comparing the average Kashmiri with his Muslim brother in erstwhile part of the State, like Gilgat or the Frontier areas, or Blochistan, the Kashmiris on Indian side are placed thousand times better, economically or otherwise. They are far ahead of others in all spheres of life. In pre- and post independence periods up to late nineteen sixties, except the affluent or the small aristrocractic class, people in general used to live a very hard life. Not to talk of usual comforts, people had hardly any money to suffice their bear minimum needs. Some times entire family had to be contented with one single suit or Kameez pajama. People would very occasionally use trousers. Items of daily consumption were not purchased in bulk, instead procured on day to day basis.

But, the times have changed and to-day one can take pride in the fact that the J&K is one of the prosperous states in the country.There is hardly any individual who does not own a house, or goes without food or is short of finance, particularly, in Kashmir region of the state. Kashmir has maximum number of doctors; it tops the doctor patient ratio in India. It is a different question that most of these doctors after availing educational facilities at the cost of state ex-chequer, finally like to take a flight to settle in rich and advanced countries like, U.S, U.K, France, Germany and now in U.A.E. etc. The remotest parts of Kashmir can boost of having scores of qualified doctors at their beck and call. It is also a fact that many qualified doctors opt for serving in cities because of shiftting tendency of population from rural to urban areas, but then there is hardly any village in the valley that lacks proper medical care facility. Majority of the people own vehicles. Most of the people have enough and to spare. With number of research institutes in all the fields of human activities and sufficient and efficient technical or non-technical force readily available, the state would have been on the path of great prosperity, but for militancy. Still, Kashmir region, in particular, enjoys the superiority in almost all the fields, because of their greater accessiablity to citadel of the power and administration. Some one once sarcastically remarked that people in valley work subject to fair weather conditions and believe in having easy money. Majority of them enjoy life in all the seasons with all modern amenities including delicious food, richest clothings, well furnished houses, vehicles and all sorts of comforts available all the time. Probably, this is one of the reasons why people find enough time and resources to work in the devil's workshop. People, in the name of religion, contribute a great deal of money and thus the construction of more and more Ibadatgahs, not a bad thing so far as these places are for people to worship in. But despite a record number of Ibadat-gahs, the number of worshippers against these Ibadatgahs has been found very low and more often instead of offering prayers, vicious elements use these places for unlawfull activities. No wonder then the incidents involving militancy related activities and hatching of conspiracies in recent times, have taken place mostly in these very places of worship. The people, otherwise also, are free to express their opinion on any subject in the open without any fear of rule of law. Even if, their opinions at times are offending, politically motivated and religiously biased, least to say anti-national. Chanting of the slogans

of freedom and demand of separation from Indian Union by vested elements is a cheap publicity stunt that provides interested elements the access to easy money. No other part of the country enjoys such a degree of freedom. Probably, the display of an act of immaturity on the part of centre has made the section of the society so prodigal that they often exploit politics to ensure personal benefits. Precisely, they have been made to feel so powerful that they do not hesitate to challenge the validity of the accession. They can hardly tolerate an opponent to question their credibility. They have created their own domain where only their interpretation of truth holds good. They have their own laws, their own prescribed punishments. It is rather Government within the Government. Ineffectiveness of the state authority can well be judged from the fact that those who are meant for policing or guarding the masses, themselves need guards for their personal security and protection. These people have gone to the extent of proving those wrong who gave them the strength and support to stand and be self-supportive. Those who nourished these elements are now the victoms of their own creation. This is the model that so called freedom fighters or Mujahideens have been aspiring for after 1947? But will it end with all the concessions in the world available to the concerned, is a big question? One can only hope that God saves the humanity from such elements who know only to sell dismay and disaster. Let the saner elements understand the gravity of the situation and stop shedding crocodile tears on self proclaimed slavery. For, they are enjoying real prosperity at the cost of the toil of millions of poor countrymen. The discontent or disatisfaction that they sometimes exhibit can be attributed to the fact that they have known the secret of exploiting the situations. Ironically the references made day in and day out on the Treaty of Amritsar in 1846, which some of them call as a treaty of dispossession, as according to them it subverted the whole social and political structure creating a vaccum at societal, cultural and religious levels, is a mere distoration of facts by those, who have no cause other than exploitation. These people make others think that the collaborator class in which they include the local pandits, were thrust upon the society and the pandits during the said rule thrieved. Questions arise, whether it was only with the taking over of the state authority by Dogras/ Hindu rulers that the floaters of this theory felt that Kashmiris were subjugated and suppressed? Had things been going on quite smoothly during the times prior to Dogra Raj? Or otherwise, was it because the exploiters

were co-religionists and the exploitation till then had been confined only on to the particular section of the society? While analyzing basics of any complex problem, you need to be fair or otherwise people can be led astray by such double standards, especially, when such problems are usually debated upon in the political circles in the open. Entire pandit community can not be held responsible or be called collaborators, moreso when history is full of instances where pandit had to suffer life full of misery for centuries together. Therefore, the pain of centuries of exploitation that they were subjected to can not be brushed off by branding them as collabrators. Barring few exceptions, where certain people, probably, influenced by the feel of drift in their favour, might have been drawn to think that they were a part of the new establishment, but then the entire community can not be looked down upon in this way. It is like Muslims, who promoted 1931 uprising, but they did not represent the entire Muslim population, majority of the Muslims then were not at all as farsighted, literate or awakened as their leaders. Probably, all of them have not been benefitted equally, but then there can be no justification for blaming them.

Krishna is reminded of one of his Muslim neighbours, Noor-ud-Din by name. A perfect gentle man, genuinely literate, balanced and selfless, who would never be led by biased and narrow political considerations. A man, who lived a life of contentment even with meager means till his death. He finds mention in next chapter of this book only because of his just, truthful and straight-forward nature. He represents the figure or true secularist and a symbol of Kashmiriyat.

Chapter V

Neighbourhood and Reminiscences

Krishna is back surveying a particular location in his native area, where once stood a nalla called Marh, a canal that would carry the burden of pollutants from main city to the out-skirts. The canal is no more there, but its course has taken the shape of a concrete circular road, with lanes / by-lanes joining different areas. He recalls that the spot where a lane connecting Nawa-Kadal with Khanda-Bawan-Tengpora-Narvorah and beyond, had a wooden bridge over the then canal, barely thirty metres away from the main crossing. Despite its weak structure, it managed the heavy traffic flow of the nearby localities. The concerned authorities had neither cared for repairing the bridge nor had ever thought of desilting or cleaning the canal, till one day it was decided that the canal had out-lived its life and thus the circular road was the only option left. Obviously, there is hardly anything to remind people of once existing bridge or the stream flowing under it. But, Krishna's childhood reminiscences had compelled him to stop at the exact place. He recollected that his nasal buds had once been immune to the rotten egg smell of H-S-H gas coming out of the contaminated waters of the neglected canal. He could hardly move further without musing on whether the change had been in tune with the concept of development, or else the masses had simply been made to accept the changes as such. Meanwhile, Krishna tried to locate yet another place that once housed a little Medical shop, run by an elderly pandit, a native of the place, who had lateron shifted to Habba-Kadal. He would treat his patients with the medicines prepared on the spot from various chemical salts, powdered and mixed in right proportion and subsequently packed by him in rectangular paper-foldings. In the case of wet mixtures, chemicals were mixed in a grinder and dissolved in H-O-H in a measuring container before pouring into bottle pasted with paper marks for the right dosage to be administered. At times, he would give injections to cure the diseases, but not without sterilizing thoroughly the syringe, for he had steel or brass syringes which he re-used and thus sterlized these every time in the boiling water. Use of disposable syringes was not in fashion that time. May be the harmful effects were not known then. Thus, nobody did ever complain

against contacting diseases. He was, especially, known for curing children and neonates of common ailments. Later on, he shifted his business to his new residence. Krishna left the spot and walked down the lane, till he caught the sight of a small house, where he applied brakes to his legs. Houses lined up along the two sides of the lane with the front sides of their lower storeys meant for shops.There were some shed like structures in between, especially, where lane splitted into two, one branch going straight through Khanda-Bhawan and the other to Id-gah via Tarbal. The house, where Krishna made a next halt, had two shops, one of which was hired by, a Hindu grocer, named Sham Lal, (There were only two such shops run by Kashmiri pandits in the entire area). Sham Lal was a petty shopkeeper, who dealt in spices, tea, sugar etc. The people with limited income would purchase items of daily consumption from him. He had also a specialty of dealing in various Ayurvedic /unanian type of medicines (Sharbats, including fruit seeds, char-tukma and so many Jadhi-buties, especially, losgass for a post-delivery bath of both neonate and its mother), Few steps down the lane, Krishna could recognize his neighbourhood. It began with Wani's house, (Tailors by profession). Noor-ul-Din, one of the inhabitants of this house had all the characteristics of a worthy neighbour, who was equally familiar amongst pandits as well as Muslims. The house, he lived in, had two families, one headed by his father and other by his uncle. Since the house was on the roadside, it had two tailoring shops; one owned by Mam Seech, his father and the other by Gul Seech, his uncle. Mam Seech had three sons, two real and one foster, all working in his tailoring shop. A tailor with expertise in sewing male suits (English style), people would usually recall his reputation as a fashionable tailor during pre-independence period. European liked his skills at machine. Unfortunately, during Krishna's childhood this old man had to work with a convex lens on his eye, obviously, the younger generation hardly trusted his worth. The poor fellow had to be contented with mending of rages. His son, Noor-ud-Din was, perhaps, amongst a few Kashmiri Muslim matriculates of his time. He was cool, composed and refined by temperament. But these qualities alone do not qualify one to be successful in life. He had little exposure to changing world and seemed to be quite contented with his lot and would never think of a change for better life prospects. (Physical infirmity/Deafness might have been one of the reasons for his lack of enthusiasm). Added to it, his brother, Kael Seech, was dumb by birth

and his foster brother a drug addict. Thus, despite his father, an acknowledged craftsman, his dumb brother a good worker and Noor-ul-din himself having fairly a good educational background, the family was still no match for Gul Seech, who was very well placed and enjoyed material prosperity. But, if pelf were the only determining factor for assessing the character, Noor-ud- Din would not have figured in these pages. It is a fact that he had little aptitude for the profession, he inherited from his father. It must have been a circumstantial compulsion for him to work as a tailor and mend the rags, but then it did not mean that he had no talent, for he looked after the postal services of the entire area, his little shop was not only tailor's workshop, but also a reading room, a post office and a meeting place for intellectuals and educated class, to whom Noor-ud-din as vendor, gave the liberty of going through Local, National dallies and Magazines free of cost, a luxuary those days. In fact, young meritorious students, majority of whom later on turned out to to doctors, engineers, lawyers, and so on, could all be seen inside the shop at one time or the other. There is hardly anyone, who would be in denial or would not acknowledge the debt to this gentleman. Yet, as matter of fact he was a failure so far as material prosperity was concerned. Even his adopted son had failed to come up to his expectation. The son was not so good at studies despite great efforts put in by Noor-ul-Din. All felt sad for the boy. They tried their best to guide him and ensured that he got through the exams. They even managed to send him to Calcutta as a sales-man (Feri-wala) with one of the neighbours. He did not return for many years. A decade later, Krishna chanced to see him in the city. It amazed him to know that this lad had married a Bengali girl and had decided to settle in Calcutta. Despite reposing confidence in his adopted son, destiny had once again betrayed Noor-ul-Din. He had a guide in one Hindu named Shri Nanwaie sahib, who had taught Noor-ul-Din, till he passed his matriculation .An Arya Samajist, a learned scholar, with firm command over various languages and hand writing exceptionally beautiful, worth imitation. Mr. Nanwaie would give free coaching to children and would distribute books, milk powder and other materials received from Red Cross and other voluntary organizations. He taught them the advantages of taking white channa drenched in water, almonds, carrot and washed leafy vegetables. He would neither allow washing the peeled off vegetables nor recommended over-cooked or excessive oily food items for consumption.

The man had no issue of his own and had adopted a female child, who was well looked after by the couple. Obviously, children might have been the appealing preposition for social activism of this charming man. His scholarship, his knowledge on religion in light of scientific truths, his deep understanding of human values coupled with simplicity of life style, had influenced most of the educated people of the locality and one among them was Krishna's father. After Mr Nanwai's retirement he had opened up a school in a posh colony of Srinagar city. Despite this man possessing amiable qualities, people would say that he was miser to the core, especially, while spending money for himself or his wife. None the less Mr. Nanwaie was held in high esteem. It was he who was responsible for providing Noor-ud-Din with an assignment of postal services of the area and the man did discharge his duty with honesty and dedication. Krishna's father had a great regard for Noor-ul-din as he considered him a man without pretensions, a person free from religious bigotry and perhaps, the only Muslim guy to participate in his barat, (the wedding ceremony). Noor-ud-din had dared the wrath of the un-ruly mob of few Pak sympthizers; diverted their attention and thus paved way for other baratis to follow safer routes. During this time, people from north and north-west of Kashmir were fleeing towards Srinagar city for saving themselves from the Qabali invaders, the tribal men from Pakistan, who had even reached up to the outskirts of Srinagar city and were involved in raping, looting and killing thousands of people of a particular community all through their way. Kashmiris, mostly Muslims, while expressing their resentment against Qabali invasion had started marching on roads, calling slogans, (Dushman Khabardar hum hai tayar). The popular leaders had by the then formed military squads, which later came to be known as J&K Maleshia. Thus, when kiths and kins in other parts of the region were fleeing from their homes for their lives, it seems so strange that some Kashmiri pandit families were quite ignorant of the political manoeuvring going on around them. They had no idea of the real danger larking around. Engrossed in celebrating marriages with great pomp and show, reflects that these people actually lacked political awareness, social coordination and a much needed far-sight. It is true that customs in Kashmir die hard, especially, when these pertain to Kashimiri pandits. They are in habit of knitting a web of social bindings difficult to tear. It is mandatory for them to follow aucipious dates, defined in their calendar. There is neither chance for a deviation from set

programme nor scope for assessing the implications of sudden developments like invasion or death. In the instant case, city was likely to come under seize and the devastation was just at their doorstep. Whether such a calendar system had the legitimacy and scienctific logic behind it or not? Reasoning suggests that flexibility is desirable at times and it is not that alternative measures are not provided in such calanders, but it all depends upon the will to act. Krishna's mother would often narrate many captivating incidents, including her father's suggestion for the function to be held in a simple way. But then, marriages in big families are occasions to be celebrated. The groom's parents could hardly take unilateral decision against family traditions, moreso when every one was ready to enjoy such an event with all fun and fair. Though, a clear warning was written on the wall, but no-body took heed off it. One of the neighbours had even assured Krishna's grand parents for all possible help in the event of any eventuality. He had even offered the family safe custody of their precious articles and ornaments. Therefore, on one side, they had the knowledge of what was going on, while on the other they had deliberatedly preferred to keep their eyes shut.They knew that the situation was not at all conducive.There were elements, who did not hesitate even to attack the baraties. Unfortunate part of it was that the bride groom was almost slapped, his garlands torn, his turban thrown off and even baraties harassed. Some of whom had to take refuge in a boat at nearby Ghayar, Yarbal (River vitasta). The elders somehow managed to dispatch the bride groom and his father on bicycle with one relative and the Muslim neighbour named Noor-ud-din for ensuring that they reach the wedding venue in time. Krishna's maternal grand parents, who were to perform Kanyadans/ marriage ceremony of their two daughters on that very day, must have had a tough time waiting for younger bride groom to arrive at the mahurat time. Noor-ul-Din proved so responsible, trust worthy and committed that he not only saved precious jewelery, costly shawls, garments and valuable articles but also avoided groom's imminent confrontation with the goons, thus, risking his own life in the process. The way he had tackled the situation and averted any untoward incident was appreciated by one and all. Ever since that day, Krishna's father would hold the man in high esteem and had soft corner for this gentleman. In-fact, everybody knew him for his sincerity; calmness and secular character. Later on, even Krishna had the chance to appreciate the decent qualities of Noor ul-Din,

whom he had always seen busy threading the needle or mending rags or reading paper or playing with the handle of his old sewing machine unmindful of people around him. Noor-ul-Din's shop comprised of wooden takhtas horizontally adjusted on the floor with the left over space at the edges of these planks providing seat for the tailor masters to sit in, who kept old and worn out machines in front of them. The place that Noor-ud-Din usually occupied had been carved out of space between the pillars. The shop had on its three sides, wooden shelves, fixed against the walls at different heights with adequate space in between. The major part of the front portion of the shop during winters would be covered with polythene sheets with paper patches pasted here and there to block the holes; the covering was nailed on the frame made out of thin wooden sticks. One could enter the shop by displacing on to one side the piece of cloth at the extreme end, suspended just adjacent to the fixed polythene sheet. The cloth used to be hung against a string tied on nail hooks with a rod inserted at the bottom to withstand the wind pressure. The shop was a reading room during evening hours or on holidays, a day and night postoffice, besides being a tailoring shop for wani family. The local people got their torn clothes stitched at the shop at nominal rates, which hardly supplemented the income needs of this lower middle class family. Perhaps, not the genuine approach to express gratitude to a man of Noor-ul-Din's nature. Now, an incident took place during the time Krishna was staying with his uncles at Srinagar. His father was posted in move office and as such the family would shift to Jammu during winter months. Accordingly, he had his initial schooling at Jammu, but had opted for an admission in a college at Srinagar for avoiding the hot summers which other-wise meant spending atleast complete four years at Jammu. On one fateful evening, it started snowing heavily. The visibility was so poor that it became difficult to differentiate things even from smaller distances. Walking on the road without electricity on such occasion would be almost impossible. (Normally POWER SUPPLY IS CUT OFF AS A SAFETY MEASURE). With no vehicular traffic on the road, things looked grim. Life seemed to have come to a stand still. But, as usual, Krishna made a slip from his home to have his evening meals with his aunt at Alikadal, half a mile from his place. Facing chilly winds and walking on the slippery snow was lesser price to pay for the delicious food that he expected to enjoy, for he had never known any other cook better than hers. Even his mother or maternal grand mother

could hardly be a match for her in this particular department. This virtuous lady, though illiterate, was a strict disciplinarian. She had an extra ordinary hygienic sense, especially, in maintaining cleanliness in kitchen and of kitchen wares. Without any exaggeration, it was one of her characteristic qualities. She had an experience of a trained butler and the judgment of a good interior decorator. With limited resources at her disposal, she would gracefully carry out her job of housekeeping and also handled day to day affairs in a most efficient and economical way. In short, she possessed the traits worth imitation. She had a separate dress for the kitchen, not so common in lower middle class families those days. She would start her day with early bath followed by Puja in a near by temple. Then she would cook her food on hearth with three instead of two usual burning outlets, designed in triangular or semi-circular shape permanently installed against the side wall of the kitchen as usual. She used the outlet at the back exclusively for boiling water. The fuel she used consisted of waste dry maize (corn flack) weeds, cow dung, chopped wood pieces. The most amazing thing about her hearth was that it offered scope for complete combustion and there would be no trace of smoke visible as otherwise a common feature of such hearths. She finished her cooking by the time her children would be ready to leave for school or college. With no modern amenities like pressure cooker or gas chulas, she managed the kitchen work with old primitive appliances, like Haah koal, Domchul etc. (Small moveable hearths). She also used Handi/ leaj, (A BAKED EARTHENWARE POT, USED FOR COOKING VEGETABLES). She had a stove, which she kept so clean that it would appear to have been purchased only a day before. Usually, she used to cook morning and evening meals in the morning session only, while afternoon tea was prepared either on Haakol or primus Kerosene oil stove, purchased from Govt Supplies & Stores department through her brother. The Golden coloured primus stove, a specialty in those days, looked like an antique. Her preparations were so good that one could feel from a distance that a particular dish or vegetable was being prepared and it definitely watered the mouth. Even the slightest invitation would tempt one to taste the dish. Whenever she served the food, it would be as hot as if prepard at that very moment. The family members never took dinner together. Strange enough that the rice or the vegetables served in thaalies whether cooked afresh or many hours earlier, could hardly be differentiated, moreso when the lid on the pot would be lifted

number times the food was served to members. She would wrap the cooked food in woolen cloths with little scope for loss of heat or change in the degree of its hotness, a wonderful art. This was true, especially, during winter months. When people in other houses liked hot preparations for tasty dinners during freezing nights, she would never resort to rekindling the stove. The simplest of the simple vegetable commonly known as Haak saag prepared by her was enough to make Krishna restless and the idea would lure him and he would be forced to leave his home often for his evening meals at his choicest place.That is why he did dare that evening to face heavy snow and choose to walk on a difficult snowy track. After the meals were over, his aunt prepared a Kangri for him. The charcoal put in the Kangri was of so good a quality that its heat was supposed to last at-least for next two days. She insisted him to stay in her house for the night, but he was adamant for he would, usually, prefer spending his nights at home. It was with great difficulty that he managed a slip from his aunt's house on the pretext that family member would be waiting for him. He reached his home very late. Expectedly, the moment he opened the door all the family members started firing at him, but he kept mum and without a word entered his room. He thought it better to close his ears and enjoy a sound sleep in his choicest bedding, which consisted of a newly prepared mattress; a quilt with fresh white cover, a newly purchased bed sheet, a Gabba bought on special request from the skilled artisans of Anantnag and last but not the least a fresh woolen blanket of pure dark coloured wool. He immediately laid his bed and jumped in to it. The sweet warmth of Kangri was enough to put him into the state of unconsciousness. Had it not for the intolerable heat out of the Kangri, he would have continued to be in deep slumber. He took the Kangri out and kept it on the right top side of his bed, rather in a corner besides the pillow, where it had the support of the partition wall on one side and raised floor of the window on the other. The bed room had two windows. One of the windows usually remained closed due to packed bedding placed on a wooden box kept in a space within the two broad pillars in which window frame had been fixed. It must have been two in the morning, when there was a big bang, as violent and as shaky as earth-quick, Krishna would have continued to be in his bed. The cradling effect not only brought the entire packed bedding on to his head, but destablised the firepot as well. In order to free himself of the load, he pushed the fallen items to the other side. The moment he did so, the thought of

Kangri struck his mind. He stood up immediately and started re-arranging the fallen bedding ensuring that it was saved from the touch of a timber. But by this time fire in the fire pot had done its work and the portion of the laid out bedding had caught fire. In panic, Krishna sprinkled water on the burning part of the bed; he did succeed in putting off the fire for the moment, but in haste while wrapping the bedding items, possibly a timber had made its way into the layers of the folded portion, which started giving smell. Krishna tried his best to put off the fire layer by layer, but it was too late, by then lot of damage had been done. Krishna collected the remains of Kangri, which still contained sufficient heat to burn the entire house. The loss was so enormous that he could hardly bear to think of it. With great difficulty he gathered his strength. The extra-ordinary sound of roof crash, his strange movements, opening windows in the dead of night that spread strong burning smell on all sides, had obviously alerted his family members in adjoining rooms. They started enquiring about the crushing sound that had shaken them. Krishna very quickly adjusted the box in its original place, lifted the packed bedding and had it arranged in exactly the same manner as had been kept earlier. Of-course this packing had escaped damage. Meantime, it was so cold outside that it would take only a few seconds for a man to freeze, but Krishna was so upset that cold winds did not affect him. The burning sensation within had taken all his energy out making his body totally insensitive to stimulation. On such an extremely cold night, one would have preferred lying in a bed. Moreso, when it had continuously been pouring in for hours. A peep through the window presented a still more dismal picture. He could now see that the roof of the out-house.(In appropriate terms Kuche, a store house built of wooden slippers and poles, where the family used to keep grains stored for the entire year), had given way under the heavy snow fall. Krishna passed on the message to his family members, assuring them that he would himself examine the extent of damage, for he wanted to dispose off the burnt items in the first instance without letting the family members know about the terrible incident. He seemed to handle the situation so carefully that the members had no chance to come out off their rooms. He came down the stairs and behaved as if he were surveying the roof of out- house, which had definitely crashed under the heavy weight of snow.In this process, he came to know that the chambers were still standing erect and fortunately the tin/ steel sheets were covering the entire place

from snow flacks to pour in. He opened the gate and stepped out on to the street, crossed the snow covered lane to throw the waste through one of the windows of the shrine wall in to a pit within. He spent the remaining part of that night in a sitting posture with his head hidden in between his legs, surprisingly not even a blanket on. Early next morning, he left his home to meet his friend, who was residing in the neighbourhood just next to his house. He knew that there was no better person to whom he could confide his secret that time. Their close relationship could be judged from the fact that Krishna wore his coat for three consecutive years, as he was to stay in Srinagar for the first time in winter for attending college after he passed his matriculation examination. Since, he had no idea regarding warm clothes he required to protect his body during winter season. His friend was kind enough to supplement his need in time. So, it was obvious for Krishna to narrate the overnight incident to his friend in the first place. Though, he also shared a very intimate and friendly relationship with elder brother (cousin) and his absence at home at times would make him feel quite lonely, yet his intuition guided him to choose his friend and not his brother for easing out his tension for the time being. His major worry was how to conceal the mishap from his parents, who after knowing all this would have decide not to let him stay alone any more? He, therefore, avoided taking any chance that might land him into trouble. Now, he would call it an irony of fate that he had no satisfactory explaination even to convince his friend regarding the loss that he suffered or his parents were put to. It was not an act of negligence on his part, but simply an unfortunate and unexpected incident. His friend did come up with an encouraging solution. He suggested that the repairs of mattress, bed sheet, quilt and that of quilt cover could best be taken care of by Noor-ul-Din, while blanket and Gabba would require seeking help of Bhaih-Sahb (his father). Now the problem was how to approach him, who apart from scolding Krishna, might inform Krishna's family members or even his parents. Somehow, both the friends devised a way out. Since, Krishna's friend had lost his mother, when he was still a child. Thereafter, he came to be looked after by his aunt, who was a widow. In-fact, she had come to stay along with her two sons in her parental house.The two friends decided to utilize her services, because she had the knack to down play the things. The moment she was told about the incident, she was greatly moved. At first, she was reluctant to take the responsibility, but then she paused for a moment

and finally agreed to talk to her brother. She assured both of them that she would try her best not to allow anybody raise quarries in this behalf. Krishna tried on his part not to let his family members know the reason of his being upset. Still, he felt desperate and wanted to mend the loss anyway. The moment he received a nod from his friend, he lost no opportunity in handing over of the possession of the damaged articles (burnt blanket and Gabba) for necessary repairs immediately. That evening, under the cover of darkness, he somehow managed to sneak out of his house with the items. By the grace of God repair work had almost restored things to their original shape. The blanket, however, involved cutting a portion out of it for subsequent re-adjustment with the rest on the spinning frame called waan in Kashmiri. Help was also sought from an expert rafoogar. / A man plugging holes with needle work. A few days later, Krishna with his friend met Noor-ul-Din, who, as usual, was holding the handle of the sewing machine while sitting at his allotted place. They politely asked him for national daily and started turning its pages quickly and then suddenly requested Noor-ul-Din if he could find time to repair their quilt, quilt sheet and mattress that had suffered damage due to some negligence. He agreed after great deal of thought and undertook the repair work so meticulously that hardly anyone could observe the scars of the mishap. But Krishna had his apprehensions, because his father was a keen observer. Surprisingly, the repair work was not noticed for quite a long time, till one day nearly six months later, Krishna's father while thrashing dust from the black blanket observed that the tiller of his paddy land, from whom he had purchased the blanket, had probably deceived him. Sure enough, he was unable to find the real cause as the faded colour of the mended portion of the blanket had deceived his insight. He could hardly know that it was not the tiller but his own son who had betrayed his trust. Mean time, Noor-ul-Din, who was not only responsible in saving Krishna from embarrassment, but even refused to accept the mending charges. He insisted that he would charge it from his father on his return from Jammu.

It was with a great difficulty that Krishna managed to open his mouth for convincing him that the money had been sent to him by his father exclusively for the purpose. It may be mentioned here that this man was always prompt in deliverance of post (letters, newspapers and money orders). His shop would often present a festive

look, because young people of nearby localities availed the free newspaper and magazine facilities here, they flocked near his shop and Noor-ul-Din was ever willing to share the up-dates with the deserving ones. Some times he would mark the important news columns to prompt the promising youths to go through relevant columns. His wife was a simple lady.

There were also other prominent families residing in the neighbourhood, who too were social and would make the entire area look like one single unit. Not that the people were absolutely free from misunderstandings, a natural phenomenon in every society, but the way elders displayed maturity and farsightedness while settling the issues amicably, made many complex problems appear simple. More importantly, these elderly people were impartial in their approach. They would always be on the side of justice, even if it meant displeasure or disgrace to their own family members. Their word would always be just and final. The parties concerned would more-often come forward admitting their fault or show their repentance for any irrational behavior displayed. May be Krishna has a chance to introduce the reader to some of these families later on? But currently he is after a journey by boat.

Chapter VI

A Memorable Doonga Journey

A mere thought of a journey by boat or Doonga gives a wonderful feeling, especially, when the person has experienced the delight of this kind earlier. Unfortunately, there is hardly any chance of enjoying such a fantastic activity in the valley at present. Strange but true, Krishna, as a child, was afraid of going near the river banks. Probably, he suffered from fear psychosis. Whether at home or in school, he neither liked nor ever tried at swimming. Whenever he visited Tulamulla shrine, (Before entering the shrine, a usual practice is to bathe in the Spring/ stream), he was so reluctant to take bath that his father would be forced to push him into the sacred stream, (An off-shoot of Sindhu Nadhi, fed by the holy waters of sacred Spring of Tulamulla). Krishna would continue to weep and sob throughout this bath. Again, the little fellow would create an awkward situation for his mother as and when the two happened to cross over the bridge (Habba-Kadal or Nawa Kadal). The moment he caught the sight of divers diving into the river and disappearing for a moment, it seemed, as if, his heart would collapse. He would cry and behave in an eccentric manner, which would show his anxiety out of the concern for the safety of swimmers bathing around.

However, as he grew up, he felt a sudden change in his attitude.He had never learnt the art of swimming, but now he was no longer averse to sailing in boats, a development quite contrary to his earlier vehement reactions, where a mere sight of the river would loosen his belt. As a non-swimmer, he considered Doonga comparatively a safer means of water transport system, as presumably he thought, it offered minimum risk of turning turtle. He started preferring pleasure trip to places, though, with well connected road links, in a Doongas on water-ways rather than travelling in fuel driven vehicles which would more often cause him nausea. It was a clear cut indication that he was bidding farewell to the phobia, he suffered from earlier. Doonga, a big wooden boat as readers may be eager to know, serves the purpose of a house on water to live on permanent basis and as a pollution free vehicle to float on water ways and thus serving a good income generating source for the poor owner. It is an innovative experience,

which is cost effective and a better substitute for a hotel or a costly house boat. It is an eco-friendly alternative for vehicle plying on roads.consuming fuel. A large section of population in Srinagar city and elsewhere, known as Hangies, have lived for ages in these boats and do so even today. These Doongas were very important means of transport system, in vogue till recently. School picnics to Dal Jheel or pilgrimage to Tulmulla and other religious places would be preferred in Doongas on Vitasta Nadhi. These boats were also hired for "to and fro journey" on number of occasions, especially, for celebrating functions on board on way to beautiful destinations.

Krishna recalls a wonderful Doonga journey that he once had on the waters of Vitasta from the then 2nd bridge (Habba-Kadal) right up to Tulumulla. Before he continues with the description of this journey, he is eager to give us some anecdotes relating to his maternal grand father, who depicts his state of mind beautifully through number of exceptionally good pieces of writing. The written notes left behind by him, in a secretly placed sealed personal container, reflects rare class, quality, and style of writing. It also displays his complete mastery over the language. Krishna, who happened to come across these notes by chance, was told by his parents that the man had a fairly good educational back ground. They added that he was extremely sensitive by nature and even though he looked to be an ordinary man, in reality he was a person of rare intellect, in-fact, a genious character. So vivid and lively was his description of events in the notes, that it made Krishna to read them again and again. He would sometimes think that this man deserved more than what life had actually offered him. Really his destiny had betrayed him. He must have been immensely in love with his wife. He not only makes mention of it in one of his notings, but also acknowledges the fact that every moment, he spent with his wife, was an unforgettable experience for him and that he had lived and enjoyed every bit of the short lived happiness in the company of his wife. Apart from being a devoted husband, he was also a caring father. After the birth of his second daughter, his wife fell sick. Her condition started deteriorating and despite the treatment from the best available physicians, her end seemed quite imminent. Prior to her death, Krishna's grand father had to leave his ancestral/ parental home for good. Around this time or sometime earlier, Krishna's great grand father had solemnized his third marriage and the cracks in father–son

relationship had probably started developing immediately thereafter. The son had pledged not to repeat the story of his father, for the thought of providing secured future for his children, must have been drawn upon him because of the mal-treatment he himself was subjected to. His father occupied a respectable post/ position in Govt. Department and had a social standing and good economic back ground, which the son lacked except that he too was a Government servant. Until, the third marriage of his father, Krishna's grand father enjoyed a princely life. It is said that as a dutiful son he had himself put forth the marriage proposal of his father before the parents of his would be mother. Not knowing that it could be the start of rift, the begining of the severe and stained relationship, where father and son were to become sworn enemies and would not even hesitate in dragging each other to the courts. However, it was more an ego clash than a real dispute on any count. While, father thought that even if his treatment towards his son might have undergone a change, still it was not fair on the part of the son to drag him into the legal dispute. Son on the other hand thought that despite the difficult phase, he had passed through on account of his wife's ailment, his father was unmoved. He was hardly twenty five years old, when he lost his partner. He must have been a frustrated man and his bitterness was obvious. Thus, the gap continued widening with every passing day. Father took son's revolt as challenge to his socially recognized and undisputedly powerful personality. Of-course, he had the privilege of being amongst first in the society to acqiure modern gudgatory to show off social status. He owned a radio set and various other items of novality of those days. He was a king in his own right. With his house situated on the road side, his favourite past time was to occupy a seat at the base of the window on the second floor facing market place. He usually sat on a gaddhi with two round pillows on two sides; a square shaped one at the back. Infront, of him, there used to be water fed hookha with two openings, one for the standing structure containing chilm that was made to fit into it and another at the base for empting or filling water and into which would be inserted one of the ends of a long pipe containing a silver tip at the other end for suction of smoke. A Kangri/ fire pot, a tobacco box and a chilm on the hookha would be the other important components of this smoking device.

In-fact, it was one of the features that displayed the standing of this gentleman. All were familiar with his impressive life style. Whether he smoked or not, he always had the tip of the pipe in between his lips. People in the entire surroundings respected the man. Women folk kept pardha while passing the road in his presence. Obviously, he would not have liked his son to show disregard to his dignity, but his son too had reasons that forced him to bade good bye to his home and start living with his maternal uncle in the first instance and later on, after his uncle's demise, reluctantly to move along with his ailing wife into his in-laws house, where he spent rest of his life. He must not have been monetarily so strong, but so far as his will power was concerned, he appeared to be ahead of his father, for he left his home never to return again. Even on his death bed, he did not show any response to his father's arrival. The moment, he had felt his end approaching; he decided to get his daughters married despite opposition from relatives who thought that the girls had still not come of age. His writings do give the assessment of his artistic tastes. The suitably worded and meticulously written material depicted his sober nature. Sometimes, he looked to be a man of aristocratic tastes, with lofty ideals and characteristic rational thoughts quite visibly displaying his unique personality, while at times he had an innocence of a child who enjoyed oscillating between heavy and light thoughts. He seemed both romantic as well as revolutionary in approach. Some of the important traits that defined this man included his typical dress code. In-fact, the choice in the collection of clothes that he wore definitely depicted his taste and temperment. Obviously, his family members had preserved the cupboard containing all his dresses that he had used prior to his death. He must have been crazy about one particular attire in which he looked like an English Barron. His collections of books or antiques would take one by surprise. In one of his light romantic notes he gives his experience on the subject of fulfillment of bodily enjoyments with his life partner. He shares with reader his techniques for exciting, or what is called as creating sexual passion in a partner by way of massaging particular parts of the body. In this behalf, he seems to have been influenced by Koka pandit's work, Kok-Shastra. He makes reference to it in support of his experience and arguments. (Koka pandit, a Kashmiri Brahmin, known the world over for his book entitled, "Kok Shastra", where-in, he provides ample guidance with scientific interpretations and widely practiced techniques, thus

his book serves as a guide for evolving better understanding while tackling challenging character, especially, female ones). However, he had his own prescriptions on the subject and laid stress on the pre-requisites, associated with or characteristicly attributed to particular individual that the person is dealing with, ensuring smooth, healthy and everlasting relationship between the two opposite individuals or a couple.

At the time, he and his ailing wife decided to move out of his home, the family of Krishna's maternal great grand father comprised of four living souls. His grand mother died soon after the shift. By the time daughters got married grand father's end seemed imminent. When he left for heavenly abode, the only two surviving members to represent the entire family were sister of great grand maternal mother and the grand maternal uncle. The reader is introduced to these two very pious and loveable souls, one a middle aged lady and another her nephew, a man in late forties, both deeply religious by nature, who tried all that was within their means to ensure that their two newly married grand nieces would not feel the absence of their parents. In fact, in later years, what they did for Krishna, his sisters and cousins, was more than what their real grand parents would have done for them. The virtious lady, who had lost her husband, while she was still a child, had ever since been living in her parental house. Having maintained her dignity, she commanded regard and respect. She would start her day with the puja in Thakur ji's room, which was no less than a temple, she worshipped here for hours together, offering milk and flower petals to her favourite diety, whose name she uttered repeatedly, by counting the beads of Rudraksh mala on the tips of her fingers. Her routine work would start in the early morning hours, fetching fresh water in a brass pitcher besides cleaning thoroughly the trammer (A copper dish) and deepaks. (Lamps that consume oil or ghee for combustion to take place with the help of soaked centrally placed cotton wick for illumination, a requirement for purifying and enlightening of mind). She used to chant mantras, while pouring water, followed by applying tilak and decorating the diety with flower petals. Last but not the least the swinging of lit Diyas / deepaks infront of the images of Gods and Goddesses. Apart from this, she had a great mastery over religious scriptures and would often quote instances from epics at random.The moment her puja session was over, she would engage

herself in cooking food items. She was an excellant cook. Every body cherished her preparations. So far as her nephew was concerned, he did not have any academic qualification. He appeared a simpleton, but otherwise, a very gentle, calm and composed soul. A sampler by profession employed in Srinagar Municipality, he had a very meager income yet he nicely managed his both ends meet. The un-utilized, but tested pure samples of the items of daily consumption collected at the time of inspections, would usually be shared by samplers, of-course, after ensuring that the samples were worth human consumption. This compensated people like him to some extent. Being a bachelor, whatever little income he had, it was sufficient to suffice the family needs as well as the occasional expenses arising out of the visits of his two nieces / so called adopted daughters and their children. The love that the two old people had for the grand children could hardly be expressed in words. Krishna, especially, enjoyed the intimate relationship with them. They showered so much of affection that the children liked to be with them all the time. It was perhaps for these two old characters that the description of this complex, but love woven family tree has been taken up. The attachment with his old maternal great grand parents can best be explained by the fact that every moment spent in the company of the two elderly people had been so memorable and full of experience for him that he could hardly forget their role in his life.

Meantime, the reader is taken some thirty five years back to witness the scenes of the wonderful journey by boat down the waters of River vitasta which Krishna and his adopted grand father had undertaken on board, the journey that had started from Habba-Kadal to its final destination at Tulamulla and back to the Kaziyar Ghat. Recalling the scene of the commencement of his maiden journey by boat to Tullamulah, the mere thought of being a part of the carvan, had so amused and excited Krishna that he did cry at the top of his voice not once but number of times, which promted his relative (maternal grand mother's brother & sister, the adopted grand parents) to advise him to keep cool. He had enjoyed short shikara trips in the company of his parents on some earlier occasions because of lack of proper road connectivity and irregular bus or Tonga services, between two stations of Habba-Kadal and Nawa-Kadal, moreover, it was also the cheapest mode of transportation available then. Such trips had given Krishna required confidence to fight his fear factor.

It may be mentioned here that some decades ago, common people derived lot of pleasure from outings to various places in Doongas, especially, during spring or summer seasons, perhaps, the only source of entertainment, the people had during those days. They also preferred hiring Doongas for a journey to places like Tulmulla, Wular and Vaskur or to Char-Chinar- Dal Lake. (The water ways journeys to religious places by Hindus were mostly undertaken for performing Havans/yagnas either by individual families or collectively by Mohalla committees/ Hawan mandlies, while people would also arrange picnics for visiting beautiful places, like Shalimar-Bagh, purely for entertainment purposes). School going children mostly preferred picnics in Doongas rather than vomiting in packed and foul smelling buses. Declining an invitation to a boat journey by a boy as inquisitive as Krishna, could hardly be thought of. Rewinding the snap shots from his memory box, he switches on the reel, scene by scene and event by event.

There used to be a sort of organisation connected with Tulamulla Shrine, of which Krishna's relatives (great grand parents referred to above) were members. This Sanstha had a large membership, who contributed in cash or kind for meeting the necessary expenses of the Mandli (Sanstha) . The members would perform two samohic Hawans, one on Zesht-Ashtimi and other on Ashad-Ashtimi, besides making arrangements on monthly gatherings on all other Ashtami. Yagnas and Puja would be performed either by Sanstha or by other social organizations/ groups including Dharmarth Trust, who would make fiscal as well as labour assistance accessible on specific occasions. In-fact, Dharmarth trust, sole care-taker/trustee of the shrine, looked after the maintenance of the shrine. As regards Snastha, its membership was open to all and the people with professional back-grounds right from well-to-do businessman to Government officials (from lower to higher ranks) from city dwellers to villagers, all were its Karikartas. These members would manage the affairs of the Mandli as well as arrange things for religious functions in a planned manner. The preparation for Zesht Ashtami festival would start a month earlier. Krishna as a child was ever eager to be part of this week long festivity and merriment, but his father was a very strict man and seeking his approval would mean a lot. Krishna on such occasions would try his best to keep his father in good humour, but more often he would feel upset as the permission

to join such a function would not be forthcoming. As the boy grew up, father realized that time had come to allow his son to take flight on his own. Accordingly, on one particular occasion, Krishna was allowed to join the members of Sanstha for undertaking the journey to Tulmulla by Doonga, but not without pre-conditions or riders.

Since, Krishna's grand parents were among the most dedicated band of workers of the Sanstha, who visited Mata Kheer Bhawani shrine frequently. These workers had played major role in assisting the Trust for proper management of the annual melas, especially, Zesht/Zaehate and Aashad /Haarh Ashtamis. Without intruding into the working of the Trust, the Sanstha would take on to itself the responsibility of performing so called Samohic Yaga on such occasions. Even Dharmarth trust would not meddle in the Sanstha's affairs. Since, it had a fair representation of the community members both from Srinagar city as well as from almost all parts and villages of Kashmir. Sanstha would also be assigned the job of occasional de-watering of holy spring, (Practice of drawing the sacred waters from the holy spring till it was almost empty enabling fresh oozing of Amrit to fill the spring, which was done atleast once in a year. This was called (Nag-pawzunh) and this task was usually carried on a week before or a day after annual Zesht-Ashtami mela). Free Langer would be arranged by the Sanstha, though not on such a large scale as is done these days. Over-crowding would sometimes turn in to unruly mob for the sake of tasting prasad from Langer, despite the fact that the devotees would be having their own arrangements. Pilgrims usually occupied the space under the open sky in the prangans (Compound) of Mata Rageem (Ragna/Shama or Kheer Bhawani or by whatever name one may call Bhawani). Offering prayers, pouring milk, decorating the holy spring with flower petals and keeping Diyas burning around its edges as well as on the entire floor of the prangan with stone slabs laid throughout, would be some of the activities that the devotees used to be busy with at Aarti time. The people would occupy the place by spreading on the slabs their mattresses or chaadhers or light beddings for comfortable night stay in the open. Each family would occupy the place well in advance to avoide row on account of rush at the time of samohic Aarti, a special feature of entire puja procedure, both in the evening and during the early morning hours. Devotees would also set up mini-kitchens at their pre-occupied places for preparing food and vegetables. Some

people with intention of staying beyond Mela would occupy rooms or covered space in the Prangan, preferrably under the shade of chinar trees as close to the sanctum as possible, so as to have full view of Mata Shama Bhagwati.Halwaies would be seen busy preparing fried puddies and lotus stems mixed in floor. Some Halwaies would cook food for well to do families in the expectation of getting handsome money. These families would arrive well in advance, fully equipped with all requisites. They usually preferred Doongas to buses for transportation of their family members, relatives and the items of necessary usage during their transit. The only thing that the devotees and management would be scared of was lest there be a sudden down pour (rain fall), which more often created havoc on such occasions. But then, it was a usual feature to witness almost every year.

Readers would perhaps enjoy the details of the pilgrimage to Tulmulla by boat, of which Krishna was one of the pilgrims. He recalls that it was a warm afternoon, people in large number had gathered at Kaziyarbal ghat.(Kaziyarbal is a place situated at some distance from Habba-Kadal Bridge, precisely, on the right bank in the direction of the flow of the river. It is a birth place of a great poet, Late Sh. Dina Nath Nadeem). That particular day, the Ghat was live with brisk activity, though, not an unusual thing as far as public gathering at the place was concerned. As a matter of fact, Hindus, usually, gathered at such ghats or yarbals in morning hours for offering sandhya, tarpans or baths and at times also assembled in connection with the performance of tenth day rites of their dead kiths and kins. Even Muslims would mark their attendance before offering their morning prayer (Nyamaaz Saher) for having gusuls at the ghat. In addition, the washermen with their bundle of clothes would be the part of the scene. The temple on the Ghat would also contibute to the rush of the people, as devotees, usually, throng at the temple gates for offering prayers in the early morning hours. Moreover, such Ghats were also meant for ration depots, installed by Food & supplies department with shalli transported from Shalli-stores to respective ghats in big boats called Khoach, or a Doonga, which could carry large quantity of Shalli in one go.

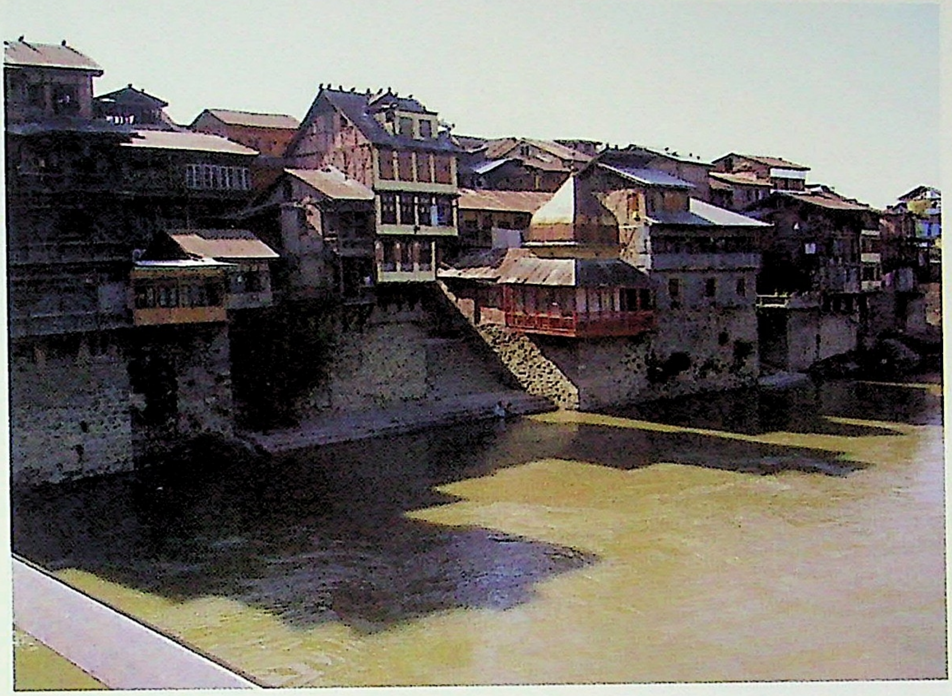
This was considered the then most viable mode of transportation of shalli or controlled food items to places connected by narrow lane system, where the waterways transport system provided comparatively cheaper and easily available means of transportation.

The shallie laden boats were anchored at the Ghats and thus huge gathering would obviously be seen there once the departmental store clerk started issuing slips for purchase of items as per ration tickets. The people with these RTs would usually gather on the steps of the ghat and would be a source of great hue and cry sometimes. But the number would decline considerably with the approach of afternoons.

However, on this particular afternoon, when Sanastha members had assembled there, the place presented a festive look. As time passed, people started gathering in large numbers. They were seen moving frequently up and down the steps of the ghat, some unloading their bag and baggage in a corner, some coming with tins of ghee, edible oil, vegetable packs, dry fruit and items of grossery on the shoulders, some carrying sacks of rice and flour on their backs, while others would be seen dragging big and small utensils down the steps. All these items were being dumped in a corner near the boat, with number of people waiting around perhaps to receive the instructions from organizers for shifting of the material and its subsequent adjustment within the basement of the boat, a portion that almost remains under water. Wooden sleepers were used to cover it from above which served the purpose of a floor for the passengers on board. Krishna accompanied by his relations had reached the spot right in time. However, he felt some what lonely after his grand parents got involved in setting things within the boat. He, thought of availing the opportunity of interacting with people not familiar to him earlier. For a moment, it gave him an impression that he was an independent entity, where neither his father nor teacher was present to correct or scold him. Suddenly, he took the opportunity of liking some people and disliking others. But this freedom of thought did not last for a long, for the fear of sailing in overcrowed boat started pestering his mind. It was return of phobia that he suffered from in his early days. All pervading fear, made him feel tired and giddy. Had it been within his power, he would have cancelled the trip. Worried at the thought of so much of load and so many passengers on board, he felt sure that the boat would capsize any moment. To overcome this catastrophe, he was ready to opt out of the expedition that he had strived for so hard. But who would listen to his woes at this juncture. Even if he were to approach his grand parents, they would not have been able to let him go at this stage. Therefore, with no other choice, except to leave himself to the care of river Vitasta, he resigned to his

lot and jumped on to the boat. By this time every thing was ready, Doonga owner, who had arrived hours in advance anchoring his boat in a corner of the bank, with ropes tied against one of the pilliar of the nearby temple base, just waiting for the arrival of all the yatries and expecting organisors to call for the final signal. His family members had painstakingly decorated the Doonga all during this time. The compartments including kitchen had been thoroughly washed. Old curtains and cushion covers had been replaced by the new ones. The utensils thoroughly cleaned for the occasion, which gave slivery look to the vessels. Even the hearth and its surrounding areas had fresh clay coatings visible. All this indicated a total overhauling of the boat. The elders during their interaction with the Hangie,(the owner of the boat), were told that the wooden slippers on which the passengers were to spend their journey time, had also been thoroughly washed and later on dried while keeping them in the open for the sun shine to take the moisture out. All this had been done because this Moslem guy, the owner of the boat, had great faith in Divinity of the holy Shrine. By 5 P.M. all the passengers had taken the seats in their allotted places on board. (The boat had separate compartments for men as well as women).

The boatsmen pushed the boat, letting loose the ropes tied earlier with the temple pilliars. They allowed the boat slowly to drift away for sometime enabling it to leave the shore smoothly. Soon the crew took their positions on two extreme edges of the boat with long wooden poles, oars and rudder in their hands. One lady crew stood at rear tip of the boat, handling the rudder with absolute care and technic. In a minute or two the boat was in the middle of the river moving along its flow. Crew would frequently dip the long poles in to the water, take it out, as and when it assumed minimum inclination with the river surface. The arrow head of the pole was lifted and struck against the river bed frequently, which helped in pushing the boat in the opposite direction of the applied push and this process continued as long as the crew could hold the grip of the pole, after which the earlier process was repeated and the boat thus kept on moving in a desired direction.It also gave the rough idea of depth of the river bed at any instance. Manual rowing of a vessel like Doonga is an art, which one can appreciate once the boat is under bridge and has to passes in between the pillars, with water currents exerting maximum resistance.



Purshyar Habba-Kadal



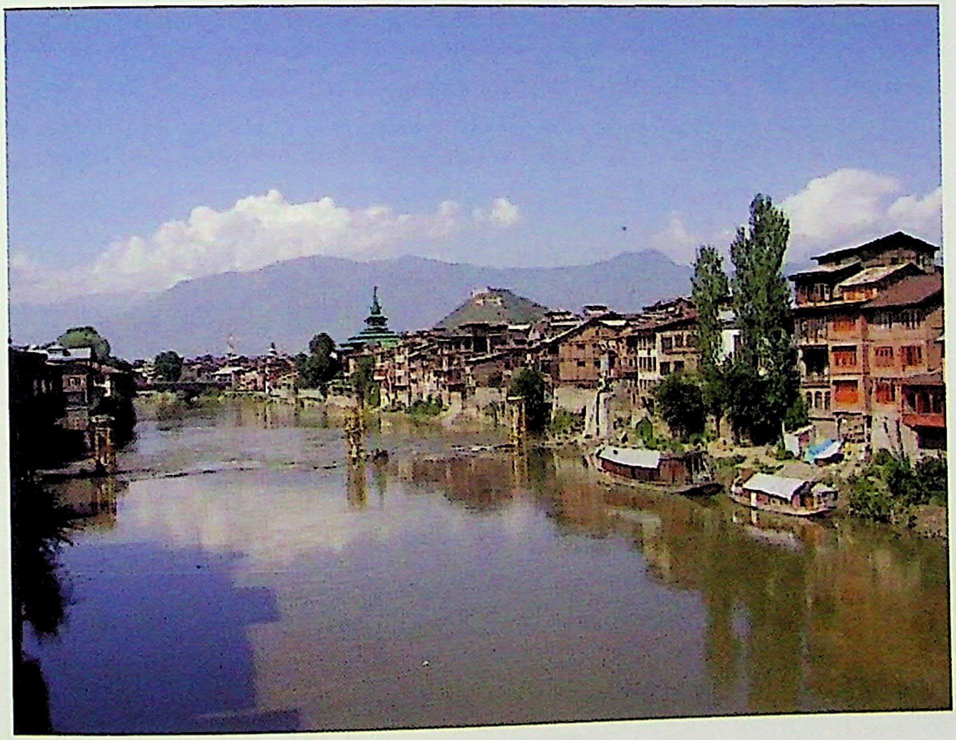
View of River Vitasta between Habba-Kadal and Feteh Kadal



A Temple at Feteh Kadal

Even a small error in rowing can cause a crash, particularly, when whirlpool formed can deceive the normal observation. Now having started journey from a place where from one can have hardly any prospect of passing under first two bridges. The first challenge that the boatmen had to face, was while moving under Fateh Kadal. Earlier this bridge had a structure made up of stone and wood only, unique and uncommon, quite unlike other bridges constructed these-days. The temples and shrines at selected spots on both the side of river banks before and after Fateh-Kadal are worth description. Number of these shall be taken up some time later. However, details of some are given here. Raghunath Mandir with a double storeyed structure on the left bank of Vitasta Nadhi situated some two hundred metres before one reaches Fateh-Kadal. The temple of Ramchander ji and Sita Mata within the complex stands on a platform like base, surrounded by a big compound and a huge white building, housing a school on the backside of it. The building on river bank has an arched opening in the lower middle part, looking like a gate, with stone steps/ a terrace going down the water level. These stairs remind a person of the temples on the banks of sacred Ganges, giving a sacred feeling in a real sense. There is a Siva temple on opposite side of the

river bank with Trika Ashram, associated with great Shivaist philosophers, Swami Ram Ji, in close neighbourhood. (The description of temples on the banks up the stream shall be taken up separately). A place called Tashwan, presently, a Mohalla near Ashai Kochha, just at a stones throw from Raghunath Mandir is situated on left side of Fateh Kadal, which starts immediately on crossing the bridge from Narpeerasthan end. Like Mysuma, it was a restricted area in by gone days. Kings had constructed palatial houses for their concubines in this secluded area so that the ladies of royal honour could live in privacy. The area in particular was covered with dense forests from all sides. These ladies were known for their intellectual alertness, motivating power, social awareness and political maturity.



River view between Fateh Kadel and Zaina -Kadal

In fact, they were trained in all the departments of life. Nobles/ aristocratic class would utilize their expertise in imparting healthy traits amongst their kids, who were, usually, left to the care of these ladies. The place had historical importance even during the times of Shamus-ud-Din Araki, who got a palace and hospice buit here for the then crowned king.



River view

On the right bank between Fateh Kadal and Zaina-Kadal bridges, stands the shrine of Kali Mata, muslims call it Shah-i- Hamadan shrine or "Amir Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani's shrine", Late R.C.Kak writes "Tradition ascribes Sayyid Hamadani's origin to the city of Hamadan in Persia. Legend goes that Timur one night wandering in disguise about the streets of his capital, Samarkand overheard an old man and his wife talking over the prospects of starvation; upon which he took off an armlet, threw it to them and departed unseen. A pretender syud, or descendant of the prophet, asked them how come they were in possession of the armlet. He accused them of having stolen it. The matter was brought to the notice of Timur, who sagaciously decreed that the owner must be the person who could produce the fellow armlet. He then displayed it in his own possession and ordered the accused to undergo the ordeal of hot iron, which he refused and was put to death in consequence.Timur, moreover, put to death all the other pretender syuds in the country. One, named syud Ali or Shah Hamdan, who was a descendant of the Prophet, accused Timur of impiety, who in return told him to leave his country. By virtue of his blessedness, he is reported to have transported himself to Kashmir aerially to descend at the spot now called Khankha. Muslims say that a Hindu devotee resided within the then temple was told to depart at once, who refused. Their version is that Shah Hamdan put up a proposal before this Sadhu that he would believe him to be a great soul if he could bring him news from heavens.

And the sadhu, who was the caretaker of numerous images, immediately dispatched one of the them to heaven, upon which Shah Hamadan kicked his slipper after it with such a force that the image fell on to the ground. He then asked sadhu how he learnt to fly images towards heavens; who replied that it was by doing charitable actions. Upon which Shah Hamdan thought him worthy of getting converted to Islam and in a matter of few days so many more followed his example. They say that two and a half kirwahs of juneons or sacred threads worn by the Brahmins were delivered up by the Hindu Proselytes. The convert fakir himself was called Shyk Baba wuli (Shaikh Baba Wali). A penance of forty days performed at his shrine is considered "ne plus ultra of the meritorious". Whatever be the truth and sanctity behind this legend, it is certain that sayyid must have been a personage of great importance, in as much as number of shrines throughtout the valley have been dedicated to his memory. A different version regarding the Sadhu is that he was in deep meditation when Shah Hamdan entered the premises of Kali Temple, he saw Sadhu holding his body above the ground, Shah Hamdan sent the sleeper in the air and as it started falling down, it struck the head of the Yogi, who felt sudden distraction in Sadhna and thus without an argument left the place. Some hold that Sayyid Hamadan had entered the valley following the old silk route via ladakh, which is justified by the belief of the local Muslims of Leh, who hold that Hamadan Shahib had a a night stay at a place called Shey some fifteen kilometers from Leh where the shrine of Shah Hamadan exists to this date.

"It may be difficult to determine the date of present structure / Shrine at Khankha Srinagar, but it is practically certain that it does not belong to the time traditionally ascribed to the migration of sayyid Ali Hamadani to Kashmir for a brief period of forty days", says Late R.C.Kak. The building is a square structure with most parts built of wooden balks. The spaces between these balks are filled with very small and carefully dressed brick. The doors and windows are the specimen of beautiful wood carving, while the wooden cornice of plinth is exquisite piece of workmanship. Its interior consists of a single large hall 63' x 43' with fourteen chambers as gowdowns each on northern and sourthern sides, one in the northwest corner contains the tomb of the saint. Inscription on the doorway to the shrine reads, 786 Hljra as the year of death of Shah Hamadan. It is said that the two key personalities who did play the most vital role in changing

the demography of Kashmir, were Mir Sayyid Ali Hamdaani and Mir Shamsudin Araakli/ Araki, while both were well revered, still what they did in Kashmir remains mostly unknown even to-day. Taarikhi Sayyid Ali gives detailed activities of Mir Ali Shah Hamdaani and his son Mir Mohammad Hamdaani. "Tohfatul Ahbaab" the history of Muslim Kashmir recorded in Persian language, which says that it was Mir Araakli, who restored the original Hamdaani practices at Khaanakaahi Hamdaaniya, especially, recitation of Avraadii Fatiha. The book describes the destruction of hundreds of temples of great grandeur, replacing these by mosques erected in their places, proudly accomplished by Mir Araakli and other suffis, the period is therefore a turning point in the history of Kashmir. However, Prof. K.N Pandit in his translation of 'Tohfatul Ahbaab' writes that after Shaykh "Alaud-Dawleh Simnani, whose followers were known as Rukniyyeh', the most impressive person of Kubravi order was Amir Sayyid Ali Hamadani. He gave what is generally known as Hamadaniyeh fraction of Kubravi order. Though, it is said that in his youth he had the opportunity of seeing Sheikh/ Shaykh 'Alaud-DowlehSimnani', but there seems a remote possibility of such a meeting keeping in view his date of birth and his initiation in to the order. Neverthless, he received Kubravi Khirqa or initiation from Shaykh Ali Dosti and Mahmud Muzdaqani. Further there is no solid proof to ascertain his descent from famous house of Alavis of Hamadan to which Gonbad-I Hamadan has been ascribed to. His great popularity with Sunnis of Kashmir and Badakhshan region could be because of so-called Alavi line of descent, which stood him in good stead for propagating love for the house of Prophet (abl-e biat). He has also been projected as Shia of Dhahabiyyeh Sufi order of the day; his Pro- Shia inclinations reflected in his spiritual training have left impact on personalities of Khwajeh Ishaq Khatalani and Jafar Badakhshi. They consider him a bridge between Kubraviyyeh and the Shia of Dhahabiyyeh School. The title "Ali Thani' meaning the peer of Ali, was given to Amir for his allegiance to Ali and his progeny, but it did not prevent him from giving full respect to prophet's companions (Sohaba), the venerable caliphs. He endorses Ali's refusal to accept caliphat of Ottman, yet he disapproves speaking ill of the campanions of prophet. Thus, his influence on Muslim Kashmir is quite immense.

Just opposite to his hospice, on left bank of the river, stands Patthar Masjid. In contrast to the indigenous constructional patterns

of valley mosques, it is the largest surviving stone structure with facade consisting of nine arched openings, including arched portico/ entrance in the centre. The roof is supported internally on eighteen extraordinary massive square columns having projections on two sides. Lower portion of the columns is built of stone and upper of briks, which is covered by a thick coat of buff coloured lime plaster. The mosque was built in A.D 1623 by Empress Nur Jahan. It is said that the queen was once asked about the approximate expenditure incurred on the construction of this mosque, pointing to her jewelled slippers, she had said, "As much as that". The mullahs took strong notice of the jest and decreed unanimouly that this reference to the mosque had made the structure desecrated and thus unfit for any religious services/ utility. And there after the building was never used as a place of worship. However, owing to its vicinity to Mujahid Manzil in Ashai Kocha, its doors have most probably been opened for Friday prayers by the socio- political workers now-days.

Moving down the river, pilgrims could come across number of architectural sites or ancient Hindu temple ruins here and there. Meantime Doonga reached zaina Kadal Bridge; passengers were enjoying the view of massive Tomb ascribed to King zain-ul-Abidin's mother, towering far above the surrounding roof tops. It is said that Zain-ul-Abidin would make occasional pilgrimage to Hindu shrines and though a tolerant King, he did not hesitate making use of Hindu temple sites at times for personal use.The plinth of the tomb with its filletted/ cleaned torus cornice is entirely a part of structure resembling Hindu built design, so are trefoiled (3-lobed ornamentation, especially, in tracery windows and entrance, its undisturbed massive jambs (side face of doorways or windows), writes Mr. Kak. Its main features lie in the glazed and moulded blue bricks, studded at intervals in the exterior walls. The tomb lies in close vicinity of Sri Ranbir Gang, the busiest and most important trading centres in Kashmir in recent past.

For onward journey, one would occasionally find temple structures and Muslim shrines/ mosques on both sides of the river bank. Prominent among them are Ram Koul's temple dedicated to Lord Rama, Sita Mata, Lakshmna and Lord Hanuman at MRGang. A huge Siva-lingum is also installed in the temple. Presently its land has been grabbed by a tenant, who runs a husking machine. The illegal occupation can be attributed to the absence of management as

well as declining number of devotees. The same is the case with remaining temples in existence like Gurgare Mohalla temple, Batayar temple (A shrine where Rishipeer had taken Samadhi); Alakh Sahibi, (Temple dedicated to Roopa Bhawani) and Ram temple of Dhar Mohalla, which till recently would catch the eye of every tourist going down the river in a Shikara. Leaving behind Ali-Kadal, Nawa-Kadal and Safa-Kadal, the description of journey would shift over to the place called chattabal, popularly known as Veer. Here a barricade holds back portion of the water for maintaining the optimum level of the river for definite reasons. There is a diversion channel with a gate, which when needed, is opened either for making the passage for the boats or Doongas to cross over or for release of the excess water. The place was once Sangam/ the confluence of two rivers,



A river view between Nawa-kadal and Safa-kadal

Vitasta and Doodhganga, latter one having been diverted at Rambagh and is no longer flowing through city, its water is fed into pipes for processing and onward distribution to public. Back to channel at Veer, the guard on duty woud stop any approaching boat, till he was sure that water on both sides of bund/ barricade was levelled. Once the gates were lifted, it would make water to rush so sudden that the flow would assume a fall like situation, where any attempt by the boats to move down the sudden flow had chances of getting capsized. Obviously, the Doonga was allowed to enter the channel only when the flow became smooth. On crossing the bund, the passangers on board were welcomed by flocks of birds thousands

in number, twittering on their return flight into their nests, declaring thereby the arrival of evening time. While the Doonga was heading towards a lonely place, the width of the river was gradually increasing and sailors thought it safe to have dinner while the boat would continue to sail. Next they reached a spot where three chinars stood majestically high. The passengers were told that it was the replica of Sona Lankh. It would have been the choicest night halting place, but the Hanjees were cynical about the safety as the place was infested with thieves. If the looters were to know about the doonga moving on with so many passengers on board, they would create serious problems. Candle lights were put off immediately after the dinner was over and the boatsmen kept the boat moving in the middle of the river. They continued rowing in the moon-lit night for hours, before anchoring the Doonga on the right bank of the river at some lonely place, which seemed almost uninhabited and visibly with no sign of settlement as far as eyes could go. The place comprised of an amazingly large green patch of land, a part of which had maize crop grown in it and in the remaining portion, a vast paddy field stretching for miles together, rare composition of beauty in nature that brought freshness to the tired eyes.

Yatris opened their beddings as army Jawans do in their trenches, they slept in two parallel rows opposite to each other with their heads facing the respective banks and feet linned up towards the centre of the chambers. A brief spell of sleep during night came to an end with crows beginning their day, crowing and flying from branch to branch, followed by the chirping of the birds, which included sounds made by Cuckoo, Nightingale, Woodpecker and many other varieties of multi-coloured small and big birds, whose sweet notes compelled the pilgrims to come out of their beds and enjoy the early morning breeze on the river bank. The calm environment surrounding the pure and unadulterated water gave the place a panoramic view. Presently, Yatries/Passengers wanted to take bath after easing in the nearby fields, but hangies did not allow them for reasons best known to them. However, they did take the liberty of Mukha Snan/ a face wash. Infact, they had their body parts including head, feet and bottom washed. The fields were abundant in milky maize covered with green cot, with nobody to restrict them from plucking and making a campfluge/ fire to bake the maize, which otherwise needed no baking. It was a compelling invitation for all the young people,

who hardly resisted the God sent gift. It was further supplemented by the break fast, consisting of hot tea and chappaties on board. Elders were against tasting maize without making payment to the owner. The problem was how to do it. The youths were directed by the elders that the approximate cost of maize utilized illegally, be collected in a container to be suitably hung against the branch of tree for the owner or watchman to receive as sale proceeds.

The next phase of the journey started immediatey after the breakfast was over. As the river began to take the shape of a shallow but vast stretch of a water body, which initially made rowing of boat difficult along the banks. The crew asked energetic and robust young men amongst the yatries between the age group of fifteen to thirty to come out of the boat, which could lighten the weight of the boat. But, for the young pilgrims, strolling on the slippery banks was not the only reason to come out of the boat, they were requested by crew to pull the roaps fastened to the front edge of the boat for moving it on shallow waters along the banks without any difficulty. The job roused enthusiasm amongst the elderly people as well, who joined in this exercise for atleast two to three hours. By the time this pulling expedition was over, the boat had started moving into deep waters. It was lunch time and the members on the expedition were requested to have their hands washed. The sheets for the feast had already been laid. Everyone enjoyed food to their fill/full capacity, had a brief nap and at tea time the boat was seen moving majestically on the surface of the water body of enormous depth, with slightly blackish colour, probably, because of the black soil at the bottom of this so called lake. Krishna's curiosity drew him out of his chambers towards the edge of the boat where the middle aged women was holding the rudder. He wanted to have the full view of the serene lake. Suddenly his Grandpa appeared on the scene. He had come to wash the used Khasoo/cup, once he leaned down on one side of the boat, his turban slipped off his head; the young boy saw this happening and in order to help his Grandpa and save his turban from being washed away, he stretched his little hands, but his body failed to find proper support and would have fallen straight into deep waters, had it not been for the timely catch of the tiny feet by the strong hands of the cook, the child would have drowned. The cook rebuked Grandpa. But he kept mum, the man had saved him from great catstrophe. He expressed his gratitude for the wonderful job he had done for him.



Shaadipora— Sangam of Sindhu Nadi and Vitasta Nadi

Soon, this lake was left behind for good and the flow once again assumed the shape of the river. At dusk the boat stood at the confluence of two mighty rivers, River Sindhu coming from Sonamarg-Baltal and River Vitasta from Veerinag. The union of two rivers assumed the shape of a big lake with a chinar standing in the centre, on the tiny island, housing a small temple. Hindus before migration preferred to immerse the urns of their dead kiths and kins in these waters, as a part of their religious rites. The place known as Prayagraj / Sangam would wear a festive look on various occasions, especially, on Grehnn days (eclipses) and on the occasion of Kumbh every twelve/ ten years, when lakhs of people would take holy dip/ bath.(Recently taken photo-snap would give an idea of the place.)

The surrounding area is called Shaadipora. The place is two to three kilometers away from Doodherhamma, a village that bridges Tullamullah with Gandherbal, a beautiful place on the banks of Sindhu Nala frequently visited during spring and summer seasons. Dudherhamma is historically an important place. Morever people associate a common joke with the place, which is mischievously related to the rights of the people. Rights/ Hakh in Kashmiri, but hakh is, infact, a buring material, mostly used as fuel by Muslims

before choolas were replaced by gas stoves. This fuel comprises of wood pieces, animal and human remains washed away by the waters of Sindhu Nala and deposited on the small islands formed by the gushing waters, especially, at this place. People make earning out of it in a similar fashion as they do out of deslitting of the river beds. Back to Sangam, the confluence of Vitasta and Sindhu Nadhis, whose waters merge their distinct identities after coming from two different directions, with distinct colours carrying the impression of the respective shades to a marked distance, which ultimately fuse into a single river to follow the mighty course? The sacred chinar tree at the place of confluence, known as Sangam (Prayaga Tirtha), finds its mention in Vitastamahatmya and Nilmath Purana. This Tirtha has a great sanctity for all Hindus especially for people from Kashmir region. The boat inimates were once again asked to keep vigil as this place during those days was notoriously known for crafty thieves. Krishna forgot to make mention of puja session that took place in a temple on the banks of river at the place called Narayan Bagh, before turning the boat towards roofless temple beneath Chinar, where people usually immerse the urns in the water as mentioned earlier, the spot where exactly the confluence of two sacred rivers take place. There is a legend that the size of this chinar at prayaga neither grows beyond its present size nor has it suffered any decay from time immorial. In-fact, in Kashmiri language, it is a metaphor, an adjective that defines a person whose physical appearance/ personality with growing age remains visibly unchanged. Back to the journey the pilgrims were asked to board the Doonga and after rowing for an hour of so, it was decided to defer the onward journey for the night. The boat was halted at the entrance of Tullamullah Nala. Probably, it was a place, where waters strip from Manasbal joins Sindhu/ Tullamullah Nala. In the vicinity is a village called Sumbal, which is famous for a shrine dedicated to NandKishour, (Nandkishour Shrine is also at Seeru, near Sopore.). Another important village in close proximity is Vaskur.

Early morning greeted the yatries with most spectacular scene of ice cold milky water of the nalla, full of silvery coloured fish hidden in weeds and little flowers along with Kenboabh (a kind of watery fruit) floating in the milky surface of the water. Boat-men started rowing the boat between the banks of the streamlet, lined with green turf and fencing of tall trees, with vegetable gardens forming the

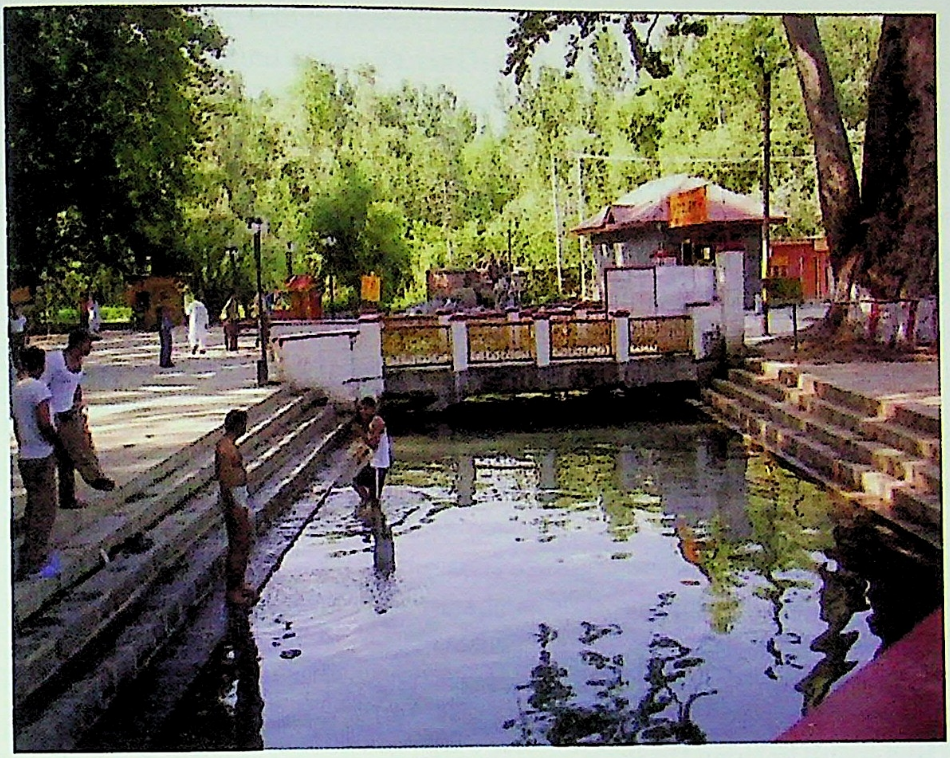
side-wise extensions of the banks. And beyond the gardens, number of fields surrounded by water channels formed due to occasional breaks or crevices in the banks at places presented a quite fascinating sight. After rowing for almost two hours through the channel, involving exercise of pulling at the roaps as well, the Doonga took a passage through a small water inlet wherefrom the yatries sighted the back side of Tullamullah Shrine. Everybody shouted Ragnya Bhagwati ki Jai, Jai Mata Ki and started chanting Shalokas. The Boat was tied to a big rocky stone, very close to the Nalla bank, facilitating the yatris on board to come out along with the belongings over a wooden sleeper which served as temporary bridge. This way the boat was unloaded. It followed, cleaning of the cooking utensils with clay. Thereafter, the yatries went to the bathing ghat in groups to have the first holy bath of the yatra. All of them gathered at the main pujasthal. One Brahmin probably employed for the performance of Aarti, started puja sessions and brought Aarti samgreh/material for the yatris to have a samohic puja. In the meantime, one elderly person stood up and started giving brief description of the Holy Shrine of Kheer Bhawani at Tulmulla. He said that the place was nearly 14 miles north east of Srinagar city and that this abode of Mata Maha Ragnya Bhagwati, the Tripura Sundari or Rageem or Shyama has been referred to by Rishi Bringesh in his book "Bringesh Sahita" (presently untraceable), wherein he gives the complete account of the holy shrine. The man added that devotees came to know about this book through one of the Mata's devotees, Dr. Bhullar, by name. He happened to trace some sixteen manuscripts of Bringesh Sahita on various holy places of Kashmir and one of them related to "Kheer Bhawani's holy Shrine", which finds description in the last chapter, "Brighu," of "Rigyna Pradubhava" where it is said that the grand father of Ravna, Pt. Rishi. Pulastya, who lived in Lanka and worshipped Godess Parvati as his Isht Devi/Diety Shyama, whom he pleaded to bestow him with Her presence in Sri-Lanka. When Ravna took the reigns of State of Sri-Lanka and started indulging in sinful deeds, which included illegal confinement of Sita Mata that lateron lead to the war and subsequent killing of King Ravna. Mata Rageem/ Ragyna Bhagwati knew in advance that Ravna was going to meet a terrible fate because of his misdeeds, sent a message to Lord Rama that She no longer wanted to stay in Sri-Lanka, who accordingly ordered Mahaveera (Bajrangbali) to take Her to Kashp-Bhoomi of Satisar along with 360 Nagas (serpants).



Tulmulla Nalla on backside of the Shrine



Hawan shallas during earlier days



Holy bath in Holy waters of Tulamulla shrine



Sanctum santoria of Kheer Bhawani

Various puranas describe this as an account of Her transformation from Shama the dark one into Gori the fair complexioned. Her favourite offering is Kheer and thus the name Kheer Bhawani. There is also a legend that some Kashmiri Pandit had a dream wherein Mata Shama ordered him to follow the serpant, who moved in the north east direction towards a marked place and after demarcating the Holy spring, it stopped near mulbary tree, which had somewhat dried roots (Tul-Mulberry and Mool–root) and then disappeared. He was told that She would reside within the Mulbery tree. Pandit started performing puja. A Bhoj Patra appeared in the Amrit Kund on which was written a mantra, which he read in a loud voice "Supreme Godess Maha Rageem, surrounded by serpants on all sides, seated on a lion throne with twelve Suns shining around Her, not visible to the ordinary eye, but to the realized souls and thus he pleaded," I prostrate before you, (probably the Rakshak Serpant) for the Godess to bless me" There is hardly any great Hindu scholar, preacher or a spiritual leader, who while on his visit to Kashmir, does not pay obeisance at this holy place, which is surrounded by the villages of Borus (Bhawanish), Ladwun (Labdawan) and Wokur (Bhagesh), besides Dudharhom (Dugdhasrama) on the Banks of River Sindhu (Shirivara), all with historical importance. Swami Vivekanada nealy a year before his departure from this mortal world visited this holy place. He is said to have expressed his anguish at the display of cowardly attitude by local populace, who according to him had not only failed to defend the temple structure over the Amrit Kund from being raised to ground, but had also proved ineffective in maintaining the sanctity of the shrine by allowing intolerant invaders to enter the abode of Godess, even if it would have meant sacrificing their mortal life. Seeing ruins of the temple here and there, he is said to have voiced his desperation, saying that had he been there during the time the holy place was under attack, he would not have allowed the invader to remain alive. He made up his mind that he would strive for building a golden temple decked with jewels and establish Sanskrit university within the shrine. With this idea lurking in mind, he felt an irresistible urge for a nap and was soon to fell fast a sleep under the shade of nearby chinar. When he woke up, he told his disciples that he had a dream, in which he was face to face with none other than the Goddess Herself. She had asked him who he was to build a temple for Her, for if She wished, She could have Herself managed errecting a grand temple. In a way, he was scolded

for indulging in an uninvited business. She reminded him that he should only attend to the duties allotted to him. It is said that from that day Swami ji even left deliberating upon the affairs of the nation. He stopped giving religious discourses. Following this incident, he is said to have remained calm and had spoken very little throughout his yatra to Amarnath ji. His followers regard Tullamula as one of their three most important Tirthas. Even now they arrange bhandara on Zesht Ashtami, every year. There is some mystery shrudded in the waters of holy spring, that displays different colours on different occasion. Krishna had the occasion of observing the holy spring water assuming different colours; such as dark, blood red, pinkish, green, snowny white, complete black and more often sparkling blue, as they say, all indications of the future happenings not only of the valley but of the entire world. A person of scientific temperament normally likes to apply his mind rather than follow blindly what others say. As his efforts get focused at explaining the cause behind the display of different colours at different times, he attributes it to the possibility of seasonal changes or the sources of oozing points, stagnation of decayed chinar leaves in water and so on, but all observations prove contrary to what the eyes behold. All analytical theories fail, when it is found that the colour change is not as per his expectations. One may expect black colour or black red (cogulated blood) colour as a result of putrefaction of chinar leaves etc. falling into the spring, but the observation is quite opposite to what one confronts the next morning. There are alteast twelve oozing points, which can be located once the spring is dewatered. These sources fill the spring in a matter of hours. Most surprising thing that one observes is the images formed by the insects on the surface of water with the flowerpetals floating over it. Again, it is wonderful to see an outline similar to that of the map of India occasionally carved out of the leaves at the top of the lofty chinar on the right side of the holy spring of which many pilgrims have taken photographs. The temple structure erected within the spring at the place where once the root of a mulberry tree /Tul-mool had grown, endows it with a divine setting. The Idols of Bhuteshwar and His consort Ragneem also called Rani Brarie installed inside the temple space, are worshipped with great devotion. Milk, sugar-cones, flower petals and kheer are offered to the deity. Chanting of sholkas from religious book, praising the glory of Siva and His consort, offering flowers into nector contained in holy spring, is the occasion that surely sets the mind in trance. Having a night stay under chinar

trees is an experience that one can hardly like to miss. The morning tempts you for a cold bath in a holy stream of Sindhu Nalla, brief puja session, of course, followed by break-fast. With mind so free and environment so beautiful, one can hardly like to miss the excitement derived from exploring nearby areas including visit to places like Mansbal, Prang or Gandarbal power station.

Chapter VII (Part A)

Beautiful Lakes, Mountains and Temple Sites

Nature has been so generous to the vale of Kashmir that the people, who are born here, have a reason to feel proud of. God has designed and decorated the vale with such perfection that it leaves hardly any further scope for introducing technology-based improvements. It seems that everythings has been created at leisure and put in at the right place. Whether, it is a mountain top, a brook, a meadow, a lake, a river, a tree, a plant, a fruit, a flower, a bird or an animal, all fit in well in the organization of this vale. No wonder then that this piece of beauty mesmerizes and beckons the beholder to respond to its call and compels him to admire and acknowledge the workmanship of the mother nature. People surely enjoy the breath taking beauty in the crystal clear waters of the lakes, deepest as Mansbal, biggest as Wular, enchanting as Dal. They spend moonlit nights at places along the banks of Dal or Vitsasta. They book huts at hill stations like Gul-margh, Sona-margh and Phalgam, where nature displays beauty par-excellance. People love to visit these places, because the time spent here not only compensates for the physical wear and tear associated with busy work schedule of mechanized life style, but also offers an opportunity to seek mental peace and divinely succor.

Krishna recalls that once in the company of his friend he footed the distance from Tulamullah to Mansbal, just to have the glimpse of Mansbal Lake and submerged Siva temple by its side. Later-on, he also approached the lake via Sumbal, a village on the left bank of Vitasta. Moving towards the lake, he also visited Andarkot, also known as Jayapura, the capital of king Jayapida. It is believed that during Kalhana's time, king Jayapida for early execution of plan of establishing the capital in the midst of an extensive marshy land, the drainage of which was a difficult task, the king Vibhishana of Ceylon is said to have helped the king of Kashmir in developing the place that had only causeway connecting it with mainland of Sumbal. Unfortunately, there is hardly anything left of the Buddhist viharas

and Hindu temples, which are said to have been built by Jayapida in his capital. Everything seems to have been destroyed. The temple of Kesava is just a big heap of shapeless boulders. Andarkot has thus a sorrowful tale to tell. It was in this very fort that the last Hindu ruler Queen Kota Devi surrendered to her servant Shah Mir on stipulations, which he did not fulfil lateron. With a very heavy heart Krishna had to take steps towards the destined place.

Mansbal Lake as stated earlier is situated at a distance of 28 km from Srinagar. The lake can be approached either through Sumbal-Vaskur road or via Tullamulla-wakura road, a distance of about seven Kms in the later case. A small hillock separates the two places from each other. Mansbal is one of the most beautiful water bodies in the valley, which was free from pollution till recently. An oval basin surrounded on all sides by hills and uplands; one can spend days together under the shady chinar or watching the reflecting moon over the lake during moonlit nights. It is so natural that such delightful spot would never have gone out of the sight of either a devout Hindu or nature adoring kings.



A view of Manasbal Lake

The temple now half submerged in water existed here from very early times, while the terraced Mughal garden, had most probably, been laid down by Noor-Jahan, locally known as Jarogha. As per a Legend, Manasbal Lake has rarely been the cause of any accidental death and the assumption that its waters are safe for swimming and boatinig holds weight. People say that Mans, the diety of this water

body, had failed to ascertain the depth of the lake, despite dipping the grass rope that he continued to knit for twelve long years, a type of penance that enabled. him to peep and dive in to his inner-self/ Atman and find the truth. The lake is almost 2.5km in length and 1.25 km in width with a beautiful garden on its northern side. The water is as cold as ice, as clear as sky, as pure as nector and as white as milk. The temple presents a marvelous specimen of Kashmiri stone architecture. It is sited on the eastern bank of the lake, half merged in water, with slightly tilted front base and the special type of roof, partially damaged due to weathering.



Submerged ancient Temple at Mansbal Lake

Moving out of Mansbal towards Sangam shaadipor, the prayag of Kashmir, as mentioned earlier, there is a confluence of two sacred rivers Vitasta and Sindhu, assuming a lake like formation with a chinar in the centre, where a small temple like structure stands built for performance of puja on various religious occasions including the religious rites during immersion of ashes of dead kiths and kins by Hindu pilgrims. From here the water takes its course for enhancing the might of Wular Lake.

So far as the description of Wular lake is concerned, it is the biggest and largest fresh water lake in India, which is fed not only by the waters of Vitasta, Sindhu and their tributaries, but has also its own oozing points with further support from high altitude lakes of Harmukh, that gives it the look of a sea rather than a big lake. Having beautiful background on all sides, it is perhaps the best combination of beauty and might. It possesses both serenity and the wilderness. Although, it remains in a tranquil state mostly in the early hours of the day, yet when winds blow, its waves rise very high, it displays its wild nature, which at times devours people in large numbers. Extended to an area of nearly 14x7 sq miles, it is surrounded by hills; of-course with the exception, on the side, where from water coming out of the confluence of Vitasta and Sindhu enters and merges with lake waters spreading its borders far and wide. There is an out passage through which water finds its way, to re-emerge as a mighty river. There is also very famous tourist spot at one of the nearby foot hills, called Vatlab. A garden here, presents the stricking view displayed by the nature. The top of this hill assumes an added importance, because of the existence of an old cave, where Muslim Faquir'Baba Shakurudin' Guru of Baba Rishi, is said to have stayed and meditated for many years. Baba Rishi's shrine lies at the hill slopes of Gulmargh on Tangmargh- Gulmargh route, just opposite to his Guru's cave. Infact, from Vatlab hill top, one can have the complete view of Baba Rishi's Shrine and Wular Lake. Even Zain-ul-Abdin, they say, could not help from indulging in the Nature's creation by establishing an island in the centre of this lake, where he laid chinar trees, now famous as Sona-lank/ Zaina lanak. But, then it is widely believed that Zain-ul-Abidin's wisemen wound up a story telling his subjects that he being the incarnation of Hari could do as he pleased. He, therefore, accomplished his purpose of declaring the creation of an island, where he built a small, but very beautiful mosque. However, the close examination of the site reveals that there had once been a Hindu temple on already existing Island.

This lake has also a legend associated with it. People say that the place, which is now sub-merged in waters, had once been a prosperous city. But then, the prosperity of this city was bred with all sorts of corruption, which had made the inhabitants insensitive and inhumane. Yet, number of pious souls also lived here. The ways of nature are mysterious, when it deals; it deals with a firm hand

and also in such a strange manner that it leaves no scope for distinction. But, before it acts, it fore-warns as well. That is what happened with an innocent potter living in the city. He had a dream repeatedly during three consecutive nights, in which he was told by some invisible power that Padma's arrival was imminent and that he should convey this message to as many people as he could. In other words, he was to tell the people that they should leave the place for the survival and safety, the sooner the better. Since, it was imminent that Padma was going to take over the possession of the place any time, the potter tried to convince all the people, he met. But nobody took his words serious. Thus, having failed to receive response from his fellow citizens, he felt quite disgusted. Ultimately, he left thinking over the consequences that Padam's arrival would have on the city and its people. He decided to set out with his bag and baggage all alone. He strictly followed instructions Padma had served him in his dreams. He moved on and on and as he was about to leave the borders of the city, he had a craving for seeing his native place for the last time. It filled him with remorse when he saw that the water had already engulfed the entire city. Had he delayed any further, the waves would have devoured him as well. The place had turned in to a lake within no time. This lake did not only become the prized possession of Kasmir, but a pride of entire Indian sub-continent. It is full of fury and can be safer for ordinary navigation usually in the early morning hours or during nights. The air remains, usually, calm during this time of the day, otherwise the wind can be dangerous for manually driven boats or Doongas. Still daring swimmers are hardly scared of the rising tides and do cross the lake for earning the qualification of wular cross. Once during Maharaja's regime, a Kashmiri youth, who was an illiterate, had succeeded getting a job with a resume that he was no pass but Wular cross. It has become a sort of jest in Kashmir since then. Christian missionary educational institutions encouraged water sports in Wular Lake. People from Sopore and Baramulla would visit Kheer Bhawani using waterways. They would start their journey during nights. Bandipora on the shores of Wular Lake is a famous township with number of ancient temple sites. Amongst these sites are the temple at Garur and an old temple of Shardha Devi on the banks of an off-shoot of river Mudumati. Garur on the north-eastern shore of the lake had a mediaval temple, its roof has disappeared and its base is buried underground. This small temple lies by the side of a spring. There is

a sculptured relief which on backside bears a three-headed Siva. So far as Shardha temple is concerned, it is dedicated to shardha Devi and was most frequently visited shrine by the people of the town and neighbouring villages. An annual hawan was performed in the temple on Govery thithy every year till1989. Bandipoa hills are also held sacred for one of the abodes of Lord Shiva, called, Dahane-shour, which is situated in the upper reaches of these hills. The cave is visited by devotees on Shrawan Purnimashi. There is a small Shiva temple at the foot hills of Dahane-shour cave near Bandipora main market, which also forms the base camp for the yatries to the cave. Hindus venture rough weathers on Raksha Bandan day to reach the cave having a hilly track of considerable height to cover, almost four to five hours journey each side. At the end of ascent, one has to pass over long wooden poles or simply fresh cut trees that bridge the two hill tops, only way to reach to the opening of the cave; most frightening experience that one can expect while crossing over a hanging pathway to the cave. This so called bridge can hold only one person at a time. Further, a very narrow passage, a tunnel leads one inside the cave. There are two rooms within the cave, accredited as kitchen and a bed room of the Lord and His consort. The rock, out of which the cave seems to have been carved out, depicts the artistic creation of the Lord. Back journey also involves crawling on the logs and then descend through jungles with fast moving brooks, which during rains can create havoc and may even prove fatal. The jouney up the hill is really frought with danger. It is as tedious as climbing Haer-shour or Seareh-shour or Mahadev, latter two situated in the vicinity of Dal Lake.

Dal Lake, a jewel in the crown of Devi Sri/ the city of Srinagar hardly needs any introduction; Mughal Kings were so fond of it that they laid world famous gardens at various ideal spots on its shores and in its close vicinity as well. King Jahangir, in particular was so enchanted by this wonderful creation of nature that he quite often seated himself in an open Shikara, of-course, in the company of his queen Noor-Jahan, enjoying the splashing of its silvery water with the wooden blades during moon-lit nights.The sparkling beauty that nature has bestowed upon the vale, the resourceful Jheel Dal, makes the capital city an uncomparable tourist destinations, especially when it comes to staying in world famous House boats.The lake has innumerous oozing points(springs)in its bed, but then it is mostly fed by the waters/ streamlets coming down from nearby peaks of

Mount Mahadeva and the surrounding mountain extending from Saerhshour to Shankaracharya, called Zeesheshura hills, supplementing this superb piece of beauty with excellent back ground. Haerehshur and Zaberwan on the back side of Zeeshtetshura. Saerhshour and Maha-Dev which are also the pilgrimages that attract both religious and sports lovers, especially, those who love hiking. The famous Dachigam Rrakh, the gardens of Haarwan, Shalimar, Nishat and Chesma-Shahi add to the grandeur of the unparallel beauty of this water body. It is sad but true that this lake is losing both its size and splendor at a speedy rate. Three-fourth of its entire area has already been converted in to a land illegally by influential capitalists, hoteliers, rich hangies and vegetable growers- cultivators.



A view of Dal Lake from Shankaracharya

Those who derive all comforts of life and earn their bread and butter at the expense of the beauty of this lake, contribute a lot in hastening its death. Crores of rupees have been invested in de-weeding, de-slitting and moniteering of pollution levels, but without any tangible result. Instead of putting in sincere efforts for preventing further damage or improving the ecology of the lake, the corrupt politicians and officials are continuing the policy of exploitation. Funds appropriated under various schemes in the absence of any

scientific planning, simply serve the purpose of enhancing the balances of those, who know the politics of exploitation. Their only aim is to keep the pot boiling and loot the Indian exchequer.

People, some decades ago, would arrange musical nights and enjoy singing and dancing, while their Doonga boats would be sailing on the still waters of Dal Jheel. There would be no pollution, no individual butchering to cut the lake to pieces and disturb the clean environment. In-fact, there would hardly be any human habitation in sight as far as eye could go, except a few house boats here and Doongas there. It had all the elements that are needed for an entertaining journey on water. For a poor man with limited resources, doonga was the best available carriage for the purpose of enjoyment and entertainment on the Jheel. But, unfortunately political corruption, personal greed, ignorance and let go approach created havoc. The contaminaton of its water has taken its toll besides telling upon the health of the people in general. Its continously diminishing size has far reaching consequences not only on the economic front but on over all ecology of the city. It seems absolutely pointless exercise to expect any visible improvement, especially, from those, who think that God created these Jheels and mountains for them to exploit.



Dal-Lake view with House boats on shores

The visit to this Lake would be incomplete without a trek to Mahadeva. But then this expedition would also require overview of the surroundings areas in the first instance. Thus, before taking up the description on trekking trip to mount Mahadeva, Krishna move into a place called Harwan.It is located about 3 Kms. from famous Shalimar Garden; A Buddhist monastery existed at the place probably dating as early as Buddhist period. It may be interesting to note that Harwan and Burzhama are two sites known for housing early human settlements in the valley. It was in Harwan that the most acknowledged scholar Nagarjuna lived almost one hundred and fifty years after Mahatma Buddha had attained Nirvana. The village was known as Sadarhadvana, the forest of six saints. Chandpura the abode of Mata Bhuvaneshwari is hardly one km. from Harwan. Haar is Myina (Here depicting Bhavanishouri) and vana a forest, is exceedingly beautiful place and one of the most frequently visited place by Tourists, especially those, who come to enjoy the beauty of world famous Gardens of Shalimar, Nishat, chashma Shahi and botanical Garden etc, often, on sundays during summer season. A streamlet drawn out of Sarbandh, probably, fed by waters of Tara-sar and Mara-sar, makes it a special choice for nature lovers and love torne birds, who enjoy dating here. garden with green turf all around has flower beds laid here and there, which bloom in multi-coloured flowers, decorating the Garden from all sides. There are number of mighty Chinar trees that provide shade over the entire area, making the place cool airy and mind refreshing, especially, when the stream-let from water reservoir flows to provide a soothing music. A small village called Chandpora, referred to earlier, is famous for the abode of Bhavanishori with a spring round the temple which is the source of a small stream teeming in fish. People visit this village particularly a night prior to Srawan Pornimashi. The village falls midway between Shalimar and Dharbagh, latter, a hamlet in the bossom of hills of Mount Mahadeva, a beautiful place known for flower/ vegetable seed farms and orchards. Shalimar, Nishat and Chashma-Shahi gardens, all laid down by Mughal Kings, are like jewels decked in the crown, rarest of the rare creation of beauty with Dal Lake in full view from all these places. Krishna is next planning to narrate the details of his expedition to Mahadev.

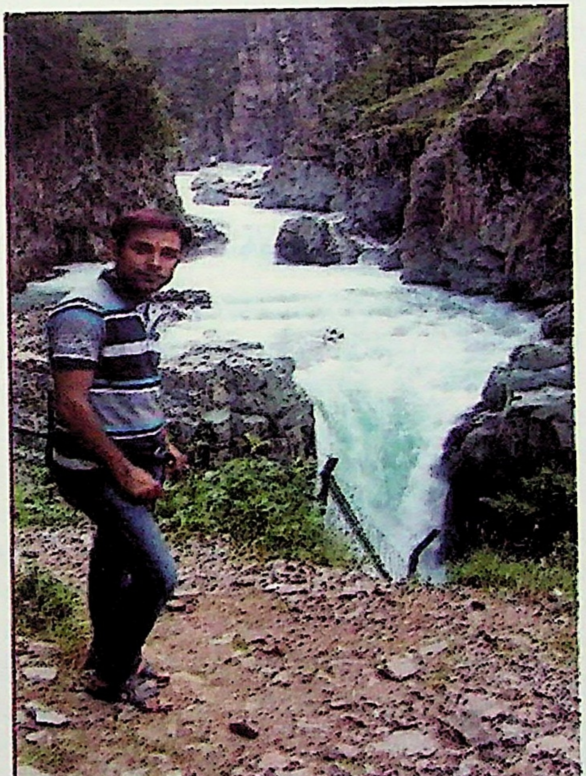
Chapter VII (Part B)

A trek to Holy Mountain Top

It was probably in the month of September that Krishna had an invitation from friends to accompany them on a trek to Mahadeva. He readily accepted the offer. After packing all the necessary items in a bag, (Viz; A torch, sleeping bag, warm clothes, utensils, and some eatables), he and his friends left for Harwan in a Private transport bus. The party reached the village at five in the evening. Immediately thereafter, they set out for the base camp and reached Dara at 7.30 P.M. By then, it was complete dark and onward journey through thick forests was not possible, moreso, when there were ample chances of confronting the beasts roaming at night. The party decided that they would halt at the nearest human habitation. Fortunately for them, they spotted a Bakerwal settlement, where they thought Kothas would be easily available. The hutments, they selected for night stay, were situated at a place on the sides of the narrow passage between two mountain ridges.The place was live with people. The party approached one of the Bakerwals, who after being persuased, agreed to accommodate all the party members on the roof of his Kotha and not within the shed that they insisted Bakarwals to let them on hire for their night stay. The shed had been erected out of a cave like structure within the hill slope, upper part of which was slightly projected outwards serving as a roof, with wooden supports from below that made it two chambered shed, one for animals and the other for his family to live in. The roof was made up of tree branches and grass covered with thick layer of the clay, spread all over. A stream flowed at some distance below the hut. There were similiar cluster of huts, built against the slope of hillock on the otherside of the stream; the only difference was that it had plenty of plain fields on its slope for domesticating animals. These sheds could hardly accommodate more than three people. Therefore, the best option for the visitors was to spend the night on the spacious roof offered. The yatris enquired of the inmates whether camping on the roof would be safe in view of the wild animals frequently roaming around, who on their part assured them that the wild beasts hardly ventured near any human habitation. Party leader bought some milk from the Bakerwal. A temporary hearth was made out of some stones

lying on the roof. Dry chopped wood pieces, dry hay and twigs were collected and fed into the hearth before striking a match stick for making the fire.





Everybody felt that there was an urgent need of sipping a cup of tea, a stimulant like tea or Khawa before meals was definitely to take away fatigue and relax the stretched muscles to a great extent. By the time meals could be prepared and served, a big vessel containing water was placed on the fire, water started boiling within seconds and the tea was ready to be served. Meantime, another group of yatris, who used to manage the annual Maha-Dev yatra on Shrawan poornimashi and performed puja of Mahadeva's Sheilla, on auspicious occasion, also arrived at the spot. Without wasting time, they took the shelter on the same Kotha roof top. This was followed by one more group consisting of young boys and girls. The new comers were also served tea. They cooked food. By 10 P.M every body had finished the dinner and after cleaning their utencils, the pilgrims soon unfolded and laid their sleeping bags on floor. Once they entered into these bags and were about to wrap the flap, one of them put up a maxim,"A bear if it were to visit here!" Suddenly, a man lying near the hearth, where the timbers were still glowing on, saw in the dark background some moving object approaching towards him, he cried and every body switched on the torch lights, a small baby bear was seen jumping out of the roof and running swiftly towards the stream. This was followed by barking of dogs and some roaring sounds. All the pilgrims felt alert and stood on their toes. Some of them also sighted two gleaming eyes in a distant cave. Thus, yatris spent their night in chanting mantras. The trek would have started early next morning, but some supernatural things that happened during that night deferred the onward movements till almost noon. However, the bright sun shine and the Bakerwals coming down the track encouraged the yatris to shed their fears and start their upward journey. They passed through dense forests on the difficult and steepy slopes and before the sun would set yatris had reached Ledwas, (A sloppy piece of pasture land). A full grown conifer tree was sighted lying on the ground. It had either fallen because of the loosening of earth beneath or due to a storm in recent past. The yatris were asked to drag it to a side immediately, so that it could be set on fire for the saving pilgrims against bitter cold. Evening food was prepared collectively at one place. The meals were served before it was complete dark. Every one had the dinner to his or her fill. Lateron, some fruits were served. It was followed by cleaning and repacking of cooking utencils. Once this exercise was over, yatris opened up their sleeping bags and blankets, expecting to

take much awaited rest. But by this time the cold weather had started showing its severity; every body sat as close to the fire/ camouflage as possible, slipping into the bag, was of no use as it could hardly protect from bitter Cold. Had the cold shielding clothes and allied items been sufficient to keep the bodies warm, the yatris would have enjoyed lying on rocky beds. As the night went on, the temperature kept on dipping abnormally low. Despite covering bodies with blankets, sleeping bags and all the woolen clothes they had, the continuous heat coming out of burning tree seemed to give warmth only to the side of the body that faced the fire, while the side away from it gave a freezing sensation. To save body from the killer cold, all pilgrims gathered round the burning tree. Imagine the situation when it started raining, followed by intermittant hail and snow. But then, such moments are part of these adventures.The morning was somewhat pleasant. As soon as sun appeared over the mountain peaks, yatris set for the final phase of their journey. They had to walk over big bulldozers/ rocks of the size of three storeyed buildings. This stretch extended for almost two kilometers at the end of which yatris once again found themselves in front of a big mountainous wall on one side and the small hillock on the other, in-fact a stretched part of the mountain. Trekkers were told that hiking was very steep for those choosing to go up the mountain to reach the pasture land where bakerwals take their domesticated animals and it surely appeared so, beyond this pasture land bakerwals told, lay TaraSar and MaraSar Lakes. Bakerwals live a life full of challenges as they risk their lives along with their animals all the time. Here the yatries moved to the right and started climbing a small but a difficult slope of a hill. It took almost half an hour to reach its top, but to move round the granite Sheilla required patience and courage. Therefore, yatries had to have darshanas of Lord Mahadeva in ones and twos. They applied Sindur to it and decorated it with flowers of different colours, while some even hoisted religious flags. Samohic Aarti was performed and Raakri tied by girls on the wrists of the boys as they descended the hill. Interesting thing about the sheilla was that it had an arc giving appearance of Jannu. Some worms like insects were seen moving round the sheilla. The projection of the sheilla on top of the hill, is such that any wrong step while circling round can land the person straight into Dachigam Raakh. One frequently finds small pits housing animals of the size and shape of a puppy, but not necessarily a variety of dog species, rather a shy animal. What it

feeds on, Could hardly be ascertained. It took an hour or so for all the party members, says Krishna, to return back to Ladwas. Bakerwals were there to quench the thirst by offering milk to drink from leather bags made of animal hides, on payment of genuine rates. This unboiled milk gave foul smell, but who could take precaution when the belly demanded refreshments. Those who tasted this milk lateron suffered from fever. Again, organizers, who performed the necessary puja, arranged Bhandara. The Prasada was distributed amongst yatries and it did serve as morning meals as well.Thereafter, the parties started downward journey. By evening yatries had arrived at the base camp and early next morning most of them left for their respective homes. It would not be out of place to mention here that great Vasu Gupta, as per Shiva Sutra Vimarshini, resided in a hermitage below holy Mahadeva Peak, also known as (Mahadev-Giri).

One night, Vasu Gupta had a dream, wherein, he saw Lord Shiva going into a vibrational mode while confronting the fact that the world, He created, was immersed in spiritual darkness. He was so moved to compassion that He made His presence felt, only to disclose to the sage (Vasugupta), the existence of certain Sutras-embodying the essence of Shiva Shasana inscribed on the rock. He told Vasugupta that the said rock was lying hidden somewhere in the valley with the inscription portion of the rocky slab concealed and buried in the earth. Probably, He meant to keep it away from the profane gaze, which by a mere touch of this sage could make the slab a topsy-turvy on its own. But for that Vasu was to discover the place and visit it in the early hours of the morning. Doing so, he could learn the sutras and that the meanings would become intelligible and he could automatically grasp the text, especially, while teaching his disciples. The particular rock goes by the name of Shankarpal, likely a corrupt term for a Sanskrit word Shankaropala. According to Kshemraja, it is the same rock that Vasugupta also talked about, although, no trace of inscription on any rock is found. Somanada, the Guru of famous Utpala (Son of Udayakara and author of Ishvara Pratyabhijana Karikas) taught this Jyana to Utpala, who being the Guru of Lakshmana Gupta and Lakshmana the Guru of the greatest scholar and teacher, Mahamaheshwara Abhinava Gupta passed on the inherted knowledge likewise down the lineage. Abhinava gupta was followed by great pupil Kshemaraja and others. Thus, based on the sutras inscribed on above mentioned rock, the philosophy

propounded by the Gurus and their pupils, during the period extending from eight to early eleventh century C.E, evolved a spiritual path that helped in understanding of absolute truth, the characteristics of Siva. It was subsequently given the name, Kashmir Shaivism. But, it was not the only form of Shaivism or Shaiva philosophy that Kashmiris practiced either prior to or during the period the above mentioned sages lived. In-fact, Kashmir shaivism may not have been an appropriate term to be used for the Sutra, as there have been various other forms that include Shaiva philosophies of Trika, Kaula and Krama, not to mention of various other manifestations of Shaivite religion itself in practice in Kashmir from time immorials. However, the study by sages and subsequent development of one of the branches of ancient Shaivite tradition into a spiritual philosophy of distinctive features eventually became known as Pratyabhijna Darshna. According to this school of thought Shiva is neither the God of destruction alone, nor an eccentric yogi of puranas, but a supreme truth, the eternal-self that exists in all things and represents all that is enclosed in this universe. Shiva, the atman is the innerself of all the beings with or without the perception of senses. Kashmir Shaivism holds that one can never have Divine identification without His grace and only those who seek for the truth attain the supreme light. The descent of Shiva's grace is what yoga of Pratyabhijna teaches. It shows the seeker the path that saves him from the suffering of limited conditioning and thus bestows upon him chidananda, the bliss of divine consciousness. A Guru, who has experienced the truth, can assist his pupil in gaining a speedy progress, as he is in immediate control of the seeker's system. He alone can purify him and remove the impediments that prevent him from recognizing the self. These impediments can be Anava-mala, Mayiya-mala and Karma-Mala. Anavamala is an impurity that makes one feel imperfect, separated and disconnected from God. Mayiyamala, on the other hand, is an impurity of perceiving duality that makes one to distinguish one living being from other and even separated from rest of the creation, while Karmamala impurity reduces one's activity to limited actions and thus forces one to suffer transmigration. The philosophy of Pratyabhijna attempts at correcting the limited conditioning of a human being. Different types of Shaivism have their typical upayas/ methodologies, which include Anavopaya to purify the physical and subtle bodies and minds. where one follows dualistic approach, mediating on any specific deity and

repeating mantras. Such minds can be made to shift to another upaya Shaktiopaya, a path or a technique where mental contemplation is the end result. Instead of repeating mantras, the mediator now works on mantras, contemplates the experience communicated by these mantras, but the mind still operates on his entity separated from the self and thus follows dualistic path, but with the experience of Shiva and subsequent merger makes him to practice both dualistic and non-dualistic approach. From here, personal efforts may lead one to follow Shambhavopaya, where Iccha Shakti, Shiva' power takes care of eliminating all residual impurities and the seeker attains divine realization /the path of non-duality. Now from hereon, the seeker is flooded with vision of recognizing self permanentally with the technique called Anupaya. The summarized details of how the evolved thoughts took shape of a distinct philosophy shall follow in succeeding paras.

GUPTH-GANGA AND SWAMI LAKSHMANJOO: Before leaving for his home on the conclusion of Mahadev yatra, Krishna decided to break his journey at Ishber, Brain, for having a brief stay at this famous temple shrine, Gupth Ganga. (People celebrated Navreeh and Basakhi festivals at the shrine before migration). He had a definite reason for a brief stay over here. He was nostalgic about the place as once he had attended one of the lectures delivered by Swami Lakshmanjoo ji Maharaj on Kashmir Saivism, which owing to the use of unfamiliar terminology had gone over his head that time. But frankly speaking, he could guess, what the great Guru was talking about, ideas seemed to germinate automatically within his mind. Lateron, he found to his amazement that such spouts had found some space within his mind, leading to the development of a concrete thought that facilitated him in understanding this particular form of Shaiva philosophy to a little extent. But, lack of expression, with thoughts at the immature level and his communication so monotonous, he could find no one to listen to his nonsense. He could not venture to say that one plus one is not two or no two things are same and even a particular thing of a particular instance could not be same a fraction of a second before or after, for it was time that mattered in a conditional world. He could not dare to express his observation that every object was infinity in itself and that it initiated its expansion from Shuneh and ultimately minimized to shuneh after traversing in both positive and negative directions. He could imagine

fluide forming droplets while passing over perforated surfaces, visualising the initial middle and the final stages in the life cycle of the minutest particles with out arriving at the ultimate conclusion.

Swami Lakshmanjoo ji, who had his lineage going back to Kashmir Shaiva Polymath Abhinavagupt, conducted classes on Kashmir Shaivism in this Shrine for many years. A booklet by Swami Ji's disciple, a foreigner has something similar to quote. She says that Shaivism had flourished in Kashmir valley for centuries before the arrival of great master Abhinavagupta and it continued to thrive, for several hundred years thereafter. Though, Shaivism was differently reproduced under various nomenclature, the non-dualistic Kashmir Shaivism, which passed down through illustrious preceptors such as Somananda (Tenth century CE) to his pupil Utpaladeva and thence to his pupil Laksmanagupta, who was Abhinavagupta's preceptor. Also worthy of mention is Khemaraja (Eleventh century), who commented on the great master's masterpiece, the Tantraloka. In-fact, Abhinavagupta was one of the architects responsible for evolving a distinct religious philosophy that had evolved between eighth and eleventh century C.E, The booklet referred to here makes it clear that there is no reliable information on the history of Kashmir Shaivism in later centuries. During fourteenth century, with the advent of Islam in the valley, the weakness within Hindu society caused the tradition to go in to the decline. Periods of tolerance under the enlightened Muslim rulers alternated with the periods of persecution. All but the Brahmins eventually converted to Islam. Temples were destroyed and a good number of Sanskrit texts were lost for ever. By 1907, when Lakshmanjoo was born, the Kashmir valley had for centuries been predominantly Muslim and although the Hindus that were left, remained strong Shaiva in orientation, but they had no aspirants left to carry the tradition on. Late nineteenth century saw two important Shaiva masters. Swami Manakak, the greatest saint, who, like many preceptors of Shaiva lineage was a house holder. His disciple, Swami-Ramjoo (1914) was a born siddha (Realized tantric adept like his master). He was held in utmost esteem by his contemporaries. It is said about him that he remained in yogic trance/ Samadhi for hours at a stretch. Among his devotees was Narain Dass, a devout Shaivist, who was also a successful businessman, He established Swami Ram's Ashram in a house at Fateh-Kadal, Srinagar. Swam Ram ji's legs had become

weak and thus needed the support of devotees for his movements from his seat. But the day he heard the news of LakshmanJoo taking birth, he started dancing. He told people around that Lakshmana had come for Rama. Pt.Narain Dass Raina was father of Lakshmanjoo. Before Swami Ram's death, the master entrusted the seven year old Lakshman to the tutelage of his senior disciple swami Mehtabkak. Such was the beginning of Swami ji's extra-ordinary spiritual career.

Born in Srinagar/ Kashmir, on May 9th 1907, he was the fifth child in the family of four boys and five girls. Swami Ji's birth happened in unusual circumstances. After his elder brother there were three more daughters and therefore parents wanted one more son. It was with the blessing of swami Ram, Lakshman ji was born to them.It is said that Swami Ram was so excited that he asked his disciples to take him to Lakshman joo's house. In an asthetic mood, he began to dance and sing. He was heard repeatedly saying that he was Rama and the child the Lakshmana. It may be mentioned here that Narian Dass though a successful merchant and entrepreneur, was a pious man. He owned mercantile stores that catered to the needs of people of British origin, who would visit Kashmir each spring and summer to escape the intense heat of Indian plains. He was a progressive man, who was always eager to find new ways to expand his business enterprise. During this time the Mahraja had a decree that only the people of the state of Jammu & Kashmiri origin could own land in Jammu & Kashmir, a law that remains in force even today. This posed a problem for Britishers. Narian Dass set himself with the idea of introducing the kind of house on water bodies of Srinagar city. This idea struct him and took the shape when British friends informed him about House Boats, a system that had long been used in Netherlands. He immediately realized that Kashmir had sufficient lakes and rivers to support such a trade. He also knew that House Boats would resolve the land ownership problem. So with research and thoughtful planning, Narian Dass built his first House Boat. This was beginning of house boat industry in Kashmir. His venture proved such a success that he soon entered the house boat trade in earnest. To-day the houseboats give tourists a unique and colourful place to stay in and enjoy nature at its best.

So far as swami ji's contribution to Kashmir Saivism is concerned, the extracts from the book under reference states that he tried his

best to devise the simplest way of explaining the most tedious, puzzlying and incomprehensible thoughts, which otherwise made Shaiva- philosophy the subject of study for only a few. Swami Lakshmanji's translation of the verse of wisdom "Bodhapan cadasika' (One of the original works composed by Abhinavagupta, the great master from all aspects, an authority on Kashmir Saivism), which can be considered as one such step in the direction. Swami Ji, while commenting on Abhinavagupta's mater piece, says that it is the core of Kashmir Saivism. Abhinavgupta in the very first verse gives us the sum and substance of the philosophy of riddles, explaining that the brilliance of one's light does not vanish in the external light or in darkness, as all light and darkness reside in the supreme light of God consciousness or the Supreme Being that we call lord Siva. He is the nature and existence of all beings. The external objective world is the expansion of His energy and it is filled with the glow of the God consciousness. If a beam of infinite light is lord Siva, then the external collection which makes up objective world is His energy (sakti)/Shakti. The external world is nothing more than expansion or so to say His energy is not separate from Him. Lord Shiva is the energy holder and the universal state of the objective fields, his energy. Swami Ji, while explaining the meaning, says that Siva and Shakti are not aware that their separation is a simple delusion, because they are not separated at all. They are interconnected as fire is with heat. It is the union of Unit with itself that God Bhairava creates, protects, destroys, conceals and reveals through different cycles, the world thus exhibited is a part of His nature. Again the whole universe is His creation, because it is in His nature, just as one finds the reflection of the world in mirror. Like-wise universe is a reflection (Pratibimba) of Lord Siva. It is created in a way as woman creates child, which at birth gets separated from her. It is rather the case of object and image, the collective state of universal being, His supreme energy (Sakti), which He created in order to recognize his own nature. It is the embodiment of collective state of universe alive with God consciousness. Swami Ji further adds When Siva was soley a Siva, He was in his full splendour, but that time He presumably did not recognize His nature and in order to recognize His nature, it becomes necessary for Him to be ignorant of His nature first, only then could He recognize it. But, why should He want to recognize His nature in the first place? It is because of His freedom, fun and joy of His realization that He plays the game.when His fullness

overflows, he still wants to remain incomplete in order to achieve completion. His freedom consists in departing from His own nature in order to enjoy it once again. This process is known as Unmesa and nimesa. Unmesa is the flourishing of that God consciousness and nemesa is the withdrawal of the same. One is expansion and the other is contraction. Siva holds both these states simultaneously within Himself. The absolute and ultimate form of Siva is shuneh (zero). It is an intermediatory phase wherefrom process of expansion and contraction of God consciousness does initiate and end. It is here that He starts overflowing his fullness. The supreme Lord Siva, who is all pervasive and fond of playing with the energy of His own nature, in consequence brings about varieties of creations and destructions. Thus, before creation or expansion, a unit beholding itself in shuneh all of a sudden gets meshed in ignorance. God is always in the process of creating the unit universe with energy in the state of ignorance. Though complete yet seemingly disconnected completely from the unit ultimately to discover that it is not so. But then infinity up to which expansion can continue and negative aspect of infinity or the process of swallowing or contraction, both have their origion in shuneh.

In the super-drama of creation, the limited state of consciousness can play the part of encouraging the development of the unit individual in a unique way. If it has taken the form of a part of rock, it can not simultaneously become a tree or a bird, a tiger or a human being. Every unit by nature has specific constitutional frame work defined for the stages of expansion and contraction. The universe in itself has ultimate destination in shuneh. However, this limitation is not for Siva, for He can take all these forms whenever or wherever it is needed. This can best be explained by the fact that ordinarily, an individual unit can live only at one particular place at a particular time, but it is not the case with God consciousness, as it is not bound by ordinary parameters of time and space. It can be anywhere and everywhere, in any and every form. It is all-pervading, during all times. There is neither beginning nor end, no time limitation, viz; binding of present, past or future, (Therefore, God realization can not be confined to any particular path). There is nothing that is outside universal consciousness; it is ignorance or the intelligence that makes the difference, the state of ignorance and the state of knowledge. When there is knowledge, a rock is not merely a rock, it

is one with Lord. This is how Abhinavgupta explains the essence of Saivism. He says that Lord Siva has the diversity of creation and destruction existing in His own nature and at the same time this diversity is found existing in its own way as the field of ignorance. Swami ji says: This is why our masters have taught us to meditate on rock and find out what rock truly is. Meditation makes the rock become universal. Now creation and destruction (Sristi – samhara) also take place together. There is creation and destruction in the cycle of action and also creation and destruction in the cycle of knowledge. A human being undergoes process of creation and destruction in the cycle of metabolism all the time, whether it is formation of a cell or its decay. A rock, in the process of creation, can be hard at present, but, it is compelled to allow the negative process to happen simultaneously and once the time frame is over, it may again be a heap of dust or like that. Thus creation and destruction is in the cycle of action. However, when action is created, knowledge is destroyed and when knowledge is created action is destroyed. If creation of mountain is perceived, it is in action and perceiving its gradually crumbling into dust after thousands of years, is knowledge. Knowing that there is no difference between the dust and the rock is knowledge. In the beginning the dust was rock and it had the shape of a rock, after thousand of centuries, the shape of the rock changed and it became dust and when there is real knowledge there is no difference between the two. An ordinary man for whom time and space matters; there is duality in feeling, for he feels pleasure as well as pain. He suffers death and enjoys birth. However, super-state of God consciousness liberates a unit from all these momentary bonds. For such a soul, existence and non-existence, is one and the same thing. The delusion of time, as it only appears but does not exist, for a human being life span may extend to 100 years, while for a mosquito it may be 24hrs. Thus, 24hours of mosquito equals 100 years of a human being.The existence of time span, is but a misunderstanding, a creation of Shiva's Nature, a play acted while creating worldly existence that terrifies the ignorant. Only Guru can liberate one from such terrifying ignorance, says Abhinavgupta, for cycles of bondage and love are the plays of Lord Shiva. Bondage is not knowing, what you are doing, which leads to establishing of what you do not know, a cycle of bondage. Cycle of knowledge is liberation, liberation can be when you understand and it is only a trick or play of the Lord. Swami Ji once said that the only difference between

Saivism of southern part of the country and Shaivism practiced in North lies in the fact that the former believe Shakti the power emanated from Siva is only the bondage, but the later think that it is both bondage as well as liberator.

The devotee of Swami Ji, from whose booklet core content has been taken says that once while delibrating upon the subject relating to religious scriptures, Swami Lakshman ji told his pupil that Lord Siva in the form of Svacchandanatha narrated the scriptures through five mouths/five openings, symbolizing his five great energies, viz; the energy of consciousness (Cit-sakti), the energy of bliss (Ananda –sakti), the energy of will (Iccha-sakti), the energy of knowledge (Jnana-Sakti) and the energy of action (Kriya-sakti). These five forms of Svacchandanatha are individually referred to as Isana, Talpurusa, Sadyojata, Vamadeva and Ahora. The scriptures, called Tantras in our Shaivism, were the creation of these five great mouths, which were classified into three divisions depending on whether knowledge contained in by these tantras were monistic/ (Abheda), monistic cum dualistic/ (Bhedab-abheda) or dualistic / (Bheda) in nature. The monistic (Abheda) Tantras are known as the Bhairava Tantras, the monistic cum-dualistic (Bhedabheda) Tantras are known as Rudra Tantras and the dualistic (Bheda) Tantras as Siva Tantras. There are sixty four Bhairava Tantras, eighteen Rudra Tantras and ten Siva tantras, making total of ninety two tantras. Siva in this form of Svacchandanatha possesses eighteen arms. These arms are symbols of elements or tattvas, offshoots of His five saktis. Cit-sakti gives rise to one element of mind. Ananda-sakti, gives rise to two elements, Buddhi and Ahamkara, the elements of intellect and ego. Iccha-sakti gives rise to five elements, which are the five vital airs (vayu) of the body, these are prana, apana, samana, udana and vyana, Jnana-sakti give rise to five elements, known as Jnanendriyas, these are five elements of knowledge, which are smell(ghrana), taste (Jihva), touch(tvak), sight (caksuh) and hearing (srotra) and lastly Kriya-sakti gives rise to five elements of action or the five karmendriyas include the organ of generation (upastha), the organ of excretion (payu), the organ of mobility (pada), the organ of holding (pain) and the organ of speech (vak). Now this form is all for the protection of the individual, but for it, he must adhere to divine discipline, which comprises of five Niyamas viz: Sauca, Santosa, Tapasya, Svadhyaya and Isvara-pranidhana. So far as five yamas are concerned, these

are; Ahimsa, Satya, Asteya, Brahmacarya and Aparigraha. Now, Sauca means clean or cleanliness of body, mind and speech, Santosa means contentment, real satisfaction opposite to greed, desire and craving for more and more, Tapasya means self control and tolerance, not yielding to temptations, Svadhyaya means self knowing, not wasting energy by mere talking and Isvara-pranidhana is the final and supreme niyama. It means love and devotion to God, the supreme self. The five moral prescriptions or five yamas include; Ahimsa, the non-violence, gross and subtle. Subtle violence means, where effects of one's action or words are taken into account. If your action causes anger or hatred in others, it is subtle violence. Gross violence is the worst of all violence, like killing others etc. Satya means truth, both objective and internal, truth that spreads peace and tranquility. Asteya means being dishonest, not physical only but includes mental dishonesty as well. Bramhmacarya means maintaining mental and physical character, not yielding to sensual temptations. And lastly Aparigraha: meaning the absence of habit and disease which included five niyamas and the five yamas.

Referring to yet another lecture of Swami Ji' on the subject, wherein he explains the meaning of Kundalini. Citing Kaulika Kundalini, he elucidates that in kula system once Kundalini rises from Muladhara cakra, it vibrates the six wheels (cakras) residing in the central path (Susumna) by supreme motion which brings them into existence. By this supreme motion, it produces exquisite sound, which fills the observer with immense joy. Ultimately reaching the abode of Lord Siva, where it resides in the thousand-spoked wheel (saharsardhacakra) in the skull and pervade the whole universe. He prays to God to let this kauliki Kundalini bestows upon all the states of universal bliss (Jagadananda). Kaulika Kundalini is a state of kundalini described in kula system as three fold, viz; prana-kundalini, Cit-kundalini and Para- kundalini. Kundalini or the chakra system is the latent energy present in each individual in microcosmic aspect, symbolized in the form of sleeping serpant. Yogis teach that this force/ Sakti needs to be raised from lowest, where she exists and pushing her through various stations, called chakras, to the highest, where Lord Siva himself resides. Hence, she ultimately reaches the summit and merges into her Lord, a stage where one is supposed to be enlightened, having really found one's self. This whole inner journey of the energy and raising it to its highest potential is a

recap of human evolvement to a higher being. But the divine power permeate both the inner and the outer world and speaking of the outer or macrocosmic dimensions of the force, Abhinav Gupta has done extensive work in explaining this esoteric, mysterious, impenetrable science. The very basics of this science are that a human being has seven major levels of existence, each corresponding to a station within his body, like dominative energy field of the particular realm of existence, so we have Muladhar, Svadhisthana, Manipura, Hrdya, Visudhia, Ajna and Sahasrara. Muladhara: The base chakra below the spinal cord, where kundalini sleeps happily with her shelter and the chakra is not transcended; one would lead the existence limited to meeting the needs of food/shelter only. This can go on for years, as in the human evolutions. This chakra dweller never sees above the materialistic realms. Svadhisthana: - The second chakra at the root of progenitive organ, reproductive organ, which appropriately stands for procreative needs of the individual or race. Manipura: - The third chakra at the navel, symbolizing the power, need of a sort of umbilical cord of the individual to his higher potential. Hrdya: the fourth at the heart denoting the emotive needs. Behaviours may be better understood at this level. Visudhha: - The fifth at the throat denoting eloquence. Agna: - the sixth chakra at the forehead, also the third eye or gyan chakshu, denoting initution, appropriately the sixth sense. Sahasrara: - the seventh chakra over the roof of the head, meaning literally, the thousand petalled or symbolically where the individual becomes anant, endless or the universe himself.

A subject of such a serious nature, required comprehensive study and space, Krishna's inability to read or write Sanskrit and his failure to reproduce accurately all that great masters have experienced and explored, he expresses his intense pain at concluding the topic unceremonously. He pays his respects to Swami Lakshman joo ji, probably, the last recognized scholar on Kashmir Saivism, who worked for propogating and preserving this treasure of knowledge for the benefit of future generations. Swami ji left his bodily remains on September 22 1991, at the age of 84. Gupth Ganga is a Shrine associated with Abhinov Gupt and succeeding Shaiva scholars. Night stay at the shrine helped Krishna to regain the strength after suffering from loose motions during his pilgrimage to mount Mahadeva. From here the next destination was Kangan. He hired a shikara up to Dalgate, where, he boarded the bus for Naranag, the

place noted in his itinerary. The yatra to Gangbal commences from here.

GANGBAL YATRA:-Every Kashmiri Pandit aspires to have a pilgrimage to Gangbal at least once in life time. Krishna would have undertaken this journey, but for untimely migration, he had to abandon his intended programme in utter despiration. Since, his father was very fond of this exceedingly beautiful place. He would so often narrate the instances relating to his expedition to this place. Naturally, it had generated an unending urge in Krishna to follow his father's pursuit. True that Krishna did not find the chance to undertake the trekking tour to Harmukh Ganga, but he has an interesting account of the pilgrimage-cum-trek to Gangbal, which his father had embarked upon. Krishna had penned down the important details some time before his father's death; which are recorded in the following paragraph.

Somewhere around 1950, Krishna's paternal grand mother, who had been bed ridden for quite sometime, called his younger son to herself and disclosed to him her last wish. She wanted her mortal remains (urn) to be immersed after her death in Lakuteh Ganga (Also called Harmukh Ganga/ Utter Ganga or Gangbal). The place is held as one of the most sacred Teerth Sethals by Kashmiri Hindus. In-fact, it has been their priligmage centre right from pre-vedic times.Krishna, who was born years after the death of his grand mother, was quite familiar with the traits of this no longer physically existing family member, for his elders would usually talk about her diverse personality and rare qualities that made her understandably different from her contemporaries. She had strong will power, unbending nature, but was sincere at heart. Her relatives had great admiration for her straightforward and selfless nature. She would always be ready to assist and help even those who would be her playful critics. Krishna's father, while recalling the Partiton of 1947 and its after-effects, which included imposition of so called ban on Gangbal yatra by the State Government, probably, for security reasons, would at times question his own wisdom in deferring the rites of immersion of the mortal remains of his deceased mother, which could have been performed some where else. But then he had resolved to fulfill the last wishes of her mother at any cost. He was so determined that even the repeated deferrments for unspecified periods did not upset him. He knew that the delay was fraught with

complexities. It meant facing tremendous social pressure, including the problem of preserving the urn with all restrictions associated with it. But all this did not deter him in any way. A great lover of games, he had been exceptionally good at games like hockey and football. Always on the look out for an opportunity to participate in different kinds of sports, the sportsman in him helped him in maintaining patience till route to Harmuk was left open to pilgrims. It was this unwavering nature that enabled him to take proper care of the ashes of his departed mother for more than two years. When Government finally gave the node to the recommencement of pilgrimage to Gangbal, the sacred lake, situated at an altitude of nearly 13000ft., the pioneer group of pilgrims/ trekkers was assured security cover by the authorities concerned. However, neither any police protection nor any escort came forth to ensure safety of the pilgrims. The touring team comprised of around twenty people including a purohit, three cooks and same number of potters, all of them eagerly waiting for undertaking the piligrimage. It was rather a voluntary decision, Krishna's father would say, "It showed firmness and commitment to faith and belief that people have been holding dear to their heart for thousands of years. What the priligrims had set themselves for, had little to do with any sort of adventurism. The arrangements for pony potters, camp equipment, eatables and food materials etc. had been made in advance by the party out of their individual contributions. The assignment regarding conduct of journey and maintenance of accounts had been left to the charge of some elderly persons in the team, which had veterans like Pt. Labh Koul, Mr. Chulloo and others, while Krishna's father was perhaps the youngest member. Their common mission was to re-establish the route, resume the piligrimage and simultaneously fulfil the last wishes of their departed souls, whose ashes they were carrying along for immersion. The difficulties faced in reaching this abode of Shiva and Parvati appeared nothing in comparison to the happiness the team derived while coming face to face with nature's unmached beauty in the form of lush green meadows, rarest of rare variety of flowers, dozens of big and small lakes /springs containing naturally distilled and unpolluted crystal clear waters, which had different colour shade at different places, like bluish- green, redish- yellow or dark with blue tinch, while a few water bodies had water as white as milk."

Being probably the most enchanting of all high altitude treks, Harmukh trek is soul refreshing, the only other trek that one can imagine to compare it with in respect of beauty is perhaps Konser Nag/ Kongwattan trek, but not as difficult as ascending Harmukh. Konser Nag is comparatively a better version in composition and background, so far as personal view of the narrator is concerned. Krishna envisions the commencement of the journey and lists out the available routes with a choice that a pilgrim can make to reach the destination safely. The option whether less challenging or tedious, all depended upon the stamina of the trekkers. The famous lake of Gangbal is approachable either from Sonamargh involving a three to four day trek or directly through Chatargul along Bramahsar or via Naranag and Wangat up the steep slope of Buth-Sher, which is a journey of only a day or two, but a real test of one's ability at trekking. At a short distance below Gangbal is Nundkol, Nandisara, where both Siva and Nandi are supposed to reside in a close proximity. There is yet another route from Prang to Raeiampangan, Reiampangan to Brahmsar, and Brahmsar to Ganga Ji (Gangbal) or via Hamasdhar then there are Dokhphour (Dokhnag), SokhPhour (SokhNag), Koulsar, Nand Koll and other water bodies' falling enroute. The route via Sonamarg across Nichnai pass, which is out of this world, says one treker-cum- writer. More than dozens of lakes fall on this trek, to name a few, we have; Krishensar, Vishensar, Brahmsar, Gadehsar, Satsar and finally the Gangbal and Nundkol lakes. Crossing Nichnai pass, one can go along the banks of the two lakes. These lakes having their own peculiarities are evident from the fact that their waters differ in colour and taste. The bigger lakes like Kishensar, Vishensar, Gangbal and Nundkol are full of trout fish. There are excellent camping sites all along the treks which contain variety of plants and flowers, especially, while climbing the pass near Gadsar to reach Satsar. As already mentioned these treks had earlier been closed in the year 1947 for sometime and later-on re-opened, Krishna's father had taken the snapshots/ photographs of the places en-route that displayed the wildest beauty that nature can exhibit any where else on this planet.

Some of these black and white photographs had been pasted by him on pad covered with glass fitted wooden frame. A unique circular cut photograph of Nand Lalla/ Bal-Krishna in the middle of lower row and exceptionally beautiful coloured photo of Murli-manohar/

Lord Krishna in omkara in the centre of the pad, had added to the attraction of these photo images, which Krishna's father exhibited in later years. He would feel proud of such a prized possession. Unfortunately, all these things have been lost due to militancy. The family had to migrate to Jammu leaving everything behind. But, surviving members of his father's trekking team continued to share the experiences of their trip to Gangbal with their juniors. Overcoming difficult situations and facing perils in reaching this sacred Dham was nothing in comparison to the joy that they had derived in performing Shradha ceremony at the banks of Luokut Ganga. They were there face to face with Harmukh, (Hara's face). Some say that Almighty created Harmukh to display His sacred charm, the expressive might and the splendid grace. This holiest of Kashmiri Tirthas, is situated at an altitude of nearly 16850ft. from sea level. A majestic mountain peak second highest in the valley after Kolia-Gashi Brar, is a huge ice Lingum, with furrows appearing as if Ganga Ji is trikling down the fountain head of Siva. People believe that this Lingum like peak of Harmukha is inaccessible and whosoever tried to ascend it has either failed or perished. Sir Aurel Stein claims that he did reach the peak in 1894. However, he too could not say with any certainity whether he had climbed the actual peak, because on reaching the peak, he is said to have expressed the doubt on the success of his mission for he felt confused while finding many other similar peaks around, some appearingly greater in height. Not sure whether he had reached Harmukh peak, the challenge did in a sense make him admit the essence behind the belief that people held for centuries. As mentioned earlier, there are more than three dozen lakes around the mountain slopes, which include Gangbal with the depth of nearly 300 feet, Nandsar and, Koulsar, Sukhnag (Sukhphur) and Dukhnag (Dukhphur) and others. Some of these drain into Krank Nadhi which flows down Nara Nag to join Sindhu Nadhi for its onward journey. Another cluster across the Zag barrier is Satsaran, Gadsar, Krishnehsar and Vishenehsar. The last two lakes are Kilometre apart, one situated at an altitude higher than the other. Water from number of lakes with melting glaciers mingle to form Kishen Ganga, which comes down to Jagtar, (Telel) and to Dawar (Gurez), wherefrom it moves with tremendous speed, broadening and shortening its wideth frequently and lastly at Kanzalwan it suddenly goes towards P.O.K, where it is known by the name of Neelam Nadhi,

it re-emerges back into the Indian side of the valley, finally to meet Vitasta Nadi at Dumail.

Krishna's father would quite often give tit bits for the guidance of trekkers. For instance, he would say that pilgrims to Harmukh Ganga should bathe, collect water for cooking and drinking puposes prior to performance of Shradha ceremony and subsequent immersion of ashes, as otherwise the water displays a sort of effervance combined with the appearance of infinite number of microbes on immersion of ashes and that one must keep either lemon or tamrid with himself on such expeditions for avoding dehydration due to excessive in-take of aroma of flowers present in air due to the abundance of naturally grown wild and exceedingly beautiful multi-variety multi-coloured flowers all around. He would say that at times, this fragrance upsets stomach, causing loose motions and even vomiting, especially, while climbing the passes between Gadsar and Satsar.

Referring to the description of the trek, he would lay stress that Narannag- Buthsher route is not feasible for normal pilgrims, but then Narannag in itself presented unmatched piece of Nature's beauty, besides the ruins of ancient temples mostly covered by dense forests around, are worth seeing. There is a wonderful temple structure made out of six stone-slabs; each as big as a pilliar, bearing testimony to the glorious past.The craftmenship without modern gudgetory or equipments like cranes or lifting machine, leaves one wonder struck at the strength and skill of the people of those times. There used to be an idol of Lord Narayan installed in this structure, whether it exists now could not be ascertained. Again, a spring enclosed in a tank like structure made out of carved slabs of quality stone, with Siva lingum in its centre and water falling on to the top of it from height, personifying what you perceive of Lord Shiva-Bhutesa in Aakara (Form). The worship of Shiva-Bhutesa has played an important role in the ancient religion of Kashmir. Bhuteshwar as Bhutesa is one of the few abodes of Lord Siva. Stream Kanknai or Kankavalim or Kranknadi fed by the waters of Naranag and lakes already mentioned, regarded as replica of Ganga and held as pious as Gangbal by those who can not foot the hilly distance easily and prefer to immerse the urns / mortal remains of the dead kith and kins in this stream. There are ruins of important tirths of Jyestheswara and Bhuteshwar, besides as many temple complexes as seventeen of various ages and dimensions, built by ancient kings

of Kashmir from time to time in admiration of Lord Siva. These temple structures usually known as Wangath Temples are either buried in the earth or hidden under the thick cover of dense forests. Tirtha-Devus or assembling of the devotees used to be held here at the conclusion of piligrimage to Harmukh Ganga on the following day of Bhadrapada Ashtami every year. On this particular Ashtimi, some yatris would also perform religious rites at Gangbal itself. Krishna would like to give separately a brief description of Narang temples in detail.

WANGATH TEMPLES at Naranag: -Temple Ruins of Wangat situated at the foot of the Bhuteshwar, AS mentioned earlier while discussing Gangbal Yatra. WANGAT-NARANNAG-BHUTESHWAR FORMS A SHARP and slippery portion of track for pilgrims ascending to reach Gangbal via Narannag. The Narannag owes its sanctity to the existence of a large spring, in the vicinity of two out of seven temples of mediaeval period. A difficult eight to nine mile track from Wusan to Narannag, (Wusan is a village on Srinagar-Sonmargh road, ancient name Sodaratirtha), along the route to Wangat, Nala Kanka-Nadi, whose turbulent waters form a striking contrast to the soothing atmosphere of long range of hills with green woods, which probably terminate in to the bare peaks of Tilal. One can take a course along narrow and long glen to reach a mountainous village, called Wangath. The area comprises of dense dark green forests of pine and fir spreading over the steep and at places appearing simply vertical hilly walls. The area is infested with wild animals, especially bears that haunt in autumn season, eating ripe maize. Initially wangath road was no better than a cow track, but it has been widened now. Winds blow along the mountain track through out the winding course with the white foaming flow of Kanka-nadhi waters strikingly in contrast to the dark green colour of the surrounding woods. Going up the hill before one reaches Narannag, a tiring walk of thirteen Kms. A site of a group of temples, commonly known as Wangath temples, is nearly five km away from the village Wangath. These temples are situated at the foot of Bhuteshwar with extremely steep and slippery ascent for Gangbal pilgrims. The ancient name of Narannag was also Sodaratirtha. It is one of the most ancient Hindu pilgrimages of Kashmir. A large spring here has two groups of temples of a special sanctity. These temples belong to mediaval period and are almost all in ruins. Judging from the structures, these temples probably have been built at different dates.The main temple is a square shaped resembling all other temples with a departure in respect of its having only two entrances one each north-east and south- west side There

is another special feature which is distinct as one examines its domed ceiling externally, which has same pyramidal shape. The lower group of temples are likewise enclosed by a massive rectangular stone wall. These temples have been identified by experts as dedicated to Lord Siva-Bhuteshwar.

SHARDA MATA SHRINE: -After narrating his father's visit to Naran-Nag, Krishna wanted to confront and conquer historical barriers for seeking the blessings of the abode of Devi Sharda / Gowrhe Mata / Sarswati Bhagwati. This most auspicious Shrine and very ancient Devi-Sethals of the vale of Kashmir is situated in a village called Sardi, where a small temple is reportedly in ruins after the village came under the occupation of Pakistan. The shrine is rarely visited by any devotee now. There is hardly any body to maintain or look after the temple shrine at present.

Krishna would have earnestly desired to land at a place called Kanzalwan. Had there been conducive political weather along L.O.C. He would have proceeded to make his the entry into P.O.K by rafting over the flow of Kishen Ganga. (In P.O.K, the area over which the river flows is known by the name of Neelam valley and the river is called as Neelam Darya, which re-emerges into the Indian side of Kashmir at Karna, the demarcation line between Indian part of the state of J&K and P.O.K.) Since, he had no such chance of being face to face with ruins of a very ancient temple; he had to be contented with borrowed tips. Sharda peetha, abode of Sharda Bhagwati in Sardi, is on a spur of mountain, at the foot of which lies the confluence of rivers, Kishen Ganga from Neelam Vaadi and Madhumati from Bandipora, besides Saraswati jal from the shrine. preceisely, the ancient holy thirtha under description, lies on the banks of Kishen Ganga on the right side within P.O.K. Kishen Ganga Joins Vitasta Nadhi at Dumail but before re-entering the territories of P.O.K., it turns into a fuming and furious stream. The ancient temple of Sardi abode of Goddess Sharda/ Saraswati, enlightens the devotees with wisdom and learning and thus dispels their ignorance. Sharda Mata does bestow the place with nature's touch. Hence the entire valley of Kashmir is sometimes referred to as Shardapeeth or uttrapeeth. The two sacred places where Goddess Saraswati is said to have opted the abode in Kashmir are at Sardi as Shardapeeth and Hariparvat as Sidhapeetha respectively. Adi-Shankaracharya was compelled to acknowledge the great depth of the ocean called wisdom, when he

had a discourse with a thirteen year old girl at the gates of Srinagar city, near Panhdraithan. He was dumb striken and thus told his disciples that they should tread cautiously as the land though far away from the sea is still deeper than the ocean. It is said that up to 14th century, Sharda and Gangbal Lake pilgrimages were performed concurrently on 8th Tithi of Badhrpath (Ganga-Ashtami), at Gangbal and Sharda Kunda on Mudhumati's bank respectively.

(Location-wise, the pilgrimage to the holy cave of Shri Amar Nath Ji ought to have come up for description, prior to yatras to Harmukh and Sharada Mata, but it was deferred with some definite reason in mind. Despite threat perception and sucidial attacks on pilgrimage to the holy cave of Amar Nath Ji, in recent years, it still attracts lakhs of devotees every year. Krishna himself has undertaken this holy journey three times, both via Baltal and along Phalgam. Krishna preferred the deviation so that continuity in the description of north-western areas is maintained. Since, the expedition from Karna has already reached Duhmail; retreat at this stage would not have been feasible. Further, it povided an opportunity to have have first hand information of the religious sites falling in Kamraz region, of-course on route to Srinagar city: It is quite possible that the description of some of the sites may have been missed by chance, but that would in no way mean that such Shrines and religious places are of less importance to the people of Kashmir).

Sardi the abode of Goddess finds frequent mention in ancient Hindu scriptures. It is a fact that Kashmiris worship mother Goddess in all forms and at all different abodes. Her form, whether Mahalakshmi/ Sidh-Lakshmi, Tripura Sundari, Ashthadashbujee, MahaKali/Kalika-Bhagwati/BhadraKalie, Durga, Jagat-Amba, Haari, Bhavanishori, Zesht Bhagwati, Kulashori, Jwala Bhagwati, Tripura Bhagwati, Bala Devi, Barghishakha Bhagwati, Shailputri, Kanimaaghe,Oma Devi, Mahamaya-Bhagwati, Mangla, Hingla, Trumbica, Sheetla/Cheechka Bhagwati, Shama/ Rageem/ Kheer Bhawani, Sharika/Pradmunpeeth Bhagwati/Sri-Chakrishore, Sharda Devi/ Saraswati Bhagwati and so on, all are worshipped by the devotees according to their understanding and mental make up.

No wonder then that Kashmir was regarded as the Srhesht Gyana Peetha (Greatest seat of learning) in the past; her people were the ardent worshippers of Goddess Sharika-Chakrishori, Gowri- Rageem or Sharda- Saraswati. They believed in Gyana Yoga. Great religious

scriptures and Treatises were compiled and philosophies propounded, which included Saiva-philosophy in various forms including Kashmir Saivism. It is said that Sharda Peeth was amongst the pioneer seats of learnings both in India and in the entire Asian sub-continent. Scholars from countries as far as Indo-China, Kampuchia, Thailand and Myanmar in the East, China, Tibet and Afghanistan in the north east and north west and up to Sri-Lanka in the South would come to Sharda Peeth both for enlightment and undergoing studies. Kashmiri scholars were held in great esteem. Scholars studied varied subjects dealing with Life Sciences, Medicines, Literature, Political Sciences, Astrology, Astronomy, Arithmatics, Geometry, Ecology and Theology. These scholars would often interact and deliberate upon the most complicated topics of the day. Unfortunately, the literary wealth compiled over thousands of years was lost due to the bloody acts of insane plunderers, who came to rule the vale, after dethroning the local rulers, in earlier part of the second millennium A.D. These invaders, mostly intolerant, destroyed the exceptionally rich treasure of knowledge. Even in later periods, the destruction continued unabated. The sources, tracing the glorious past of this seat of learning, includes the pieces of information drawn from the books and manuscripts authored by native scholars and seers, smuggled out successfully by brave hearts and also some of the written material in Sharda/ Sanskrit that had found the way out into other parts of the country in normal course or even by chance, prior to the whole-sale destruction of the treasure. Other-wise also there are references contained in the written travelogues by travellers and scholars of great repute, who visited the vale from time to time. These references do serve as vital source for re-inventing the lost treasure to a great extent, despite reverses on account of frequent turmoils and turbulences in the valley. The most interesting thing to note is that Sharda language with a script of its own, a sister language of Sanskrit and even older than Sanskrit itself, had almost gained the status of lingua-franca and was an alternative medium of instruction at Sharda Peeth. The sphere of study varied from time to time and from Religion to Political Philosophy, Astrophysics to Meta-Physics, Social Sciences to Medicines, Vastu-Shastra to Architecture Engineering and Astrology and Numerology to Astronomy. Kashmiris happen to be blessed by Sharda Devi. That is how valley can boast of producing men of letters, who sprouted the seeds, invoking quest for Knowledge amongst people across Indian sub-continent. Many foreign scholars

have acknowledged their debt to this seat of learning. A scholar having privilege of being a student of Sharda peeth, once wrote that Goddess Saraswati had taken her abode in an appearingly small spring, but with immeasurable depth, wherefrom a single drop of nector could mean an access to a great treasure of knowledge.Thus, with such an accomplishment, any individual could find solutions to the riddles that nature offered. Nag-Arjuna, a Budhist theologian belonged to the vale of Kashmir, was responsible for spreading Buddism in Tibet and China. Vareha Mehar a great Astrologer-mathematician could foretell the future with absolute accuracy. There is a famous incident involving his personal life that made him denounce the world. It is said that his wife was in a family way and was about to deliver a child. Since, Vareha knew, he could not be with his wife during delivery time. In order to know the exact time of birth of their child, he instructed her to give the rope a shake. (The rope had been tied in between wooden pole supporting the roof and the inner bolt of the door of the delivery room). Meantime, a cat hiding itself on the ceiling was also to deliver kittens; one of these newly born kittens chanced to fall on the rope, which resulted in shaking of the rope. The ever vigilant Astrologist immediately set himself to some calculations; the inference from the result was quite confusing. He felt crest fallen and could not believe that the new born babe could be a kitten instead of a human child. He left his home then and there.

Kashmiris have always shown intense urge for unveiling the secrets hidden in the lap of nature for they had the fortune of tasting the drops of nector at Sardi. It is this source of inspiration that encourages the people to contibute to the preservation and promotion of culture and learning and keep live to its past glory. Adhi-Guru Shankaracharya, after bringing together all the Hindu cults, sub-cults, sects and adherents of different faiths and schools of thought, set to work in ensuring their convergence into a single fold by infusing in them the sense of pride at the concept of unity/ the oneness in diversity. Here the people had the choice to offer prayers to God either as Shiva or Vishnu or their incarnations or any other diety in Aakara, the Idol form or in Nirakar-roopa, formless form as per the mental level, taste and temperament of an individual. He segregated the saints and seers into ten groups and allotted them Akharas, referred to as Dashnami Akharas. Obviously, he had dedicated his

short span of life in achieving a feat, with hardly any parallels in the annals of history. Besides travelling far and wide, he also visited Shri Sharda at Sardi and Shri Shaila at Baramullah, in the vale of Kashmir. At Sardi he faced volley of questions and queries, before the Seers of Shrine complex offered him the highest seat of learning / an access to wisdom in Hindu spiritual ethos. He had the honour of opening the southern gate or entrance to the temple complex, closed hitherto. Adhi Shankara worshipped mother Sharda and called upon the Divine power to grace him so that he could carry out his mission of spreading Sharda Peeth traditions successfully in all the four directions of the country. He established Muths of Dwarika Sharda Peeth, Shardhamba Peeth Shringeri, Himalayan Kedarnath Peeth and Puri Muth at Brindaban. Later-on he visited Kanchipuram, the place housing the shrine of Devi Tripura, where he had enjoyed the sustenance during early childhood. He attained salvation at the age of thirty two, leaving his bodily remains at Kedarnath. However, before his merger with ultimate truth, he succeeded in churning out all religious scriptures and subsequently provided the devotees with prescription in the form of Advaita Vedanta. He worked hard to infuse rational thinking amongst people for development of their intellect. He also re-constructed/ repaired Shankracharya temple and established a mini- Muth at Srinagar.

Krishna along with his associates were to visit all the known shrines (North West to southern region of the valley), (Maraz to Kamraz), excepting, of-course, the shrines and temples, whose description had been given earlier. However, the journey did not commence strictly in order of the locations from Kohalla-Bridge to Srinagar and beyond, the party had chosen the main town of Baramula and its interior parts, which was followed by trips to places in the adjoining areas.)

Chapter VIII

Temples, Shrines and Caves

Krishna and his group had planned to study the remnants of bygone days that are more often hidden in the shade of dust with hardly any chance for the explorer to reach out at the exact layer, unless, of-course, some incusitive eye is there to spot, strike and dig out the secrets burried underneath. An exercise involving exploration of this kind is more or less a challenge, especially, when it is related to the revelation of the veiled truths of the forgotten past. The folk tales and the legends do sometimes play an important role in reaching out at the lead source of information. Krishna and his fellow members had a difference of opinion on whether parables, which pass on from mouth to mouth, over generation to generation, should genuinely be trusted upon as relevant study material? In the end, all of them had to agree that as long as legends serve the purpose of grasping or deciphering the puzzles or help in establishing a link between the present and the distant past, there was no reason to discard its application. In-fact, the prudent use of such tools, could certainly help in identifying the specific changes that have occured either naturally or unexpectedly. Krishna chooses important religious sites in the first instance.

BARAMULA TOWN: - Baramula in Kashmir is actually pronounced as Varahamul, probably, named after Veraha Avtar, incarnation of Lord Vishnu in Boar's form. A legend goes that the waters of Satisar drained off, once the mountains near Khadinyar (Hills at Sheeri Narvaw, present day Sheeri), splitted up in to two parts, the passage so formed within the crack, made water to flow out of the Satisar. Sheeri Narvaw assumed the shape of the mouth of Veraha, Thus, the place with the appearance of Veraha's Mukh/ face in course of time came to be known as Varamul. It is situated nearly 55km from Srinagar on Uri- Muzzafarabad road in Kamraz Parganas; it has a Vishnu Shrine called Adi-Veraha located on the Eastern Bank of Vitasta. Koti-tirth, which was destroyed by Sikander Buthshikan, is said to have been one of the most splendid temples and barely half a mile away from Adi-Veraha temple. Some broken stone pieces depicting the specimen of once existing piece of

architectural beauty, are seen lying around at the spot. The only object of interest that presently draws the attention of the visitor is that there can be seen a large human-faced Siva-Linga at the site even to-day. On the left bank of the river in the vicinity of Baramula, is an ancient site of Hushkapur, which is popularly known as Ushkur. Besides a Vishnu temple, there was also a Buddhist Vihara / Stupa at one time. Great Chinese traveller Heun Tsang during his visit to the valley, stayed here for a night. Kanishka buried two copper sheets at this place on which the proceedings of second Buddhist council were engraved. Two important river ghats of Vitasta Nadi in Varmul town, are Ramghat and Bharavghat. Ramghat had a temple dedicated Lord Ram.



Shailputri Asthapana at Baramula



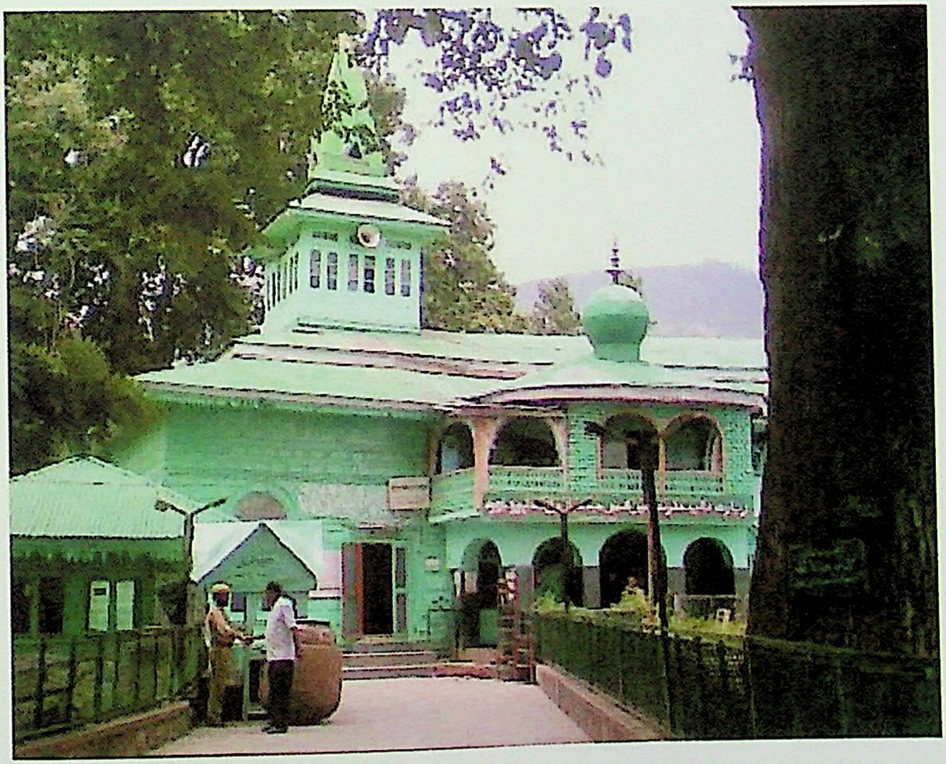
Shailputri Asthapana Baramula Town on the banks of Vitasta

SHAILPUTRI BHAGWATI ASTHAPAN:- A temple, dedicated to Shailputri Bhagwati on the left bank of Vitasta, lies in the heart of Baramula town. Shailputri the deity of the temple is worshipped on first of Navratra, being one of the nine Bhagwatis (Nau-Durgas). The shrine is the replica of Tulamulla Kheer Bhawani temple. Shail means mountain and putri the daughter viz daughter of Mountain Himalaya. Shailputri is Parvati. People from entire Baramula district would attend almost all the important religious festivals, held in the temple shrine. In recent times, it was one of the most visited religious places in Baramula. The temple is presently maintained by security forces. For the last few years migrant Kashmiri pandits have been engaged in renovating the shrine. Annual Yaga continues to be performed during Nav-Durga days. But, people who visited the temple more recently say that temple structure including walling that holds the spring water has suffered extensive damage due to weathering, earth-quake and neglect.

GUSAIN TENG:- It is yet another important shrine with seven springs bearing names like Ram Kund, Sita Kund, and Laxman Kund etc. The independent out-lets of its springs combine to form a brook, which is said to be flowing right since the times of Lord Rama. There

is a Ram Mandir at Ram Gath. Religious processions would start on Ram-Navami, Dushera and Janam Ashtami. Various other festivals would also be celebrated here.

ANAPURNA BHAGWATI/ SAKHI JANBAZ SAHIB'S SHRINE:- There used to be a Devsthal in Baramula dedicated to Devi Anapurna. It is said that one Malang/ saint came to meditate at this place. He was a man of great spirituality. He would serve people irrespective of religion, caste, creed or colour. His name was Janbaz. He was kind hearted and would give anything he had in offering. People usually called him by the name of Sakhi. A Dargha was built at the place and was named after this pious man as Sakhi Janbaz Sahib's Shrine. There is a hearth and a famous Daegh/ a big vessel used for preparing prasad. The Daegh is known as Janbaz Shabhn Daegh, in which turmeric rice is cooked for the devotees. It is said that this daegh is never empty. The place is visited both by Hindus and Muslims with equal faith and devotion.



Janbaz Sahib' Shrine at Baramula

(The party on their visit to important places/ sites and might have lost sight of or left out some important places both by mistake

and for lack of timely information. Any positive suggestion coming forth from any quarter at any time shall be welcomed. Inclusion of shrines left out and changes proposed shall thus be incorporated willingly, provided these are accompanied by reference to the source, with details of place and the shrine involved. An expectation of sharing the requisite information of the monuments and religious places/centres located in both Kamraz and Maraz regions, not covered in this edition, shall definitely find space in revised edition. For the present it is hoped that brief account on almost all the known temples and monuments, on the bases of information gathered either from books, notes and manuscripts or noticed during the actual visit to these places should suffice).



Shiv Temple at Baramula

KOTI TIRTH:- A shrine in Baramula town dedicated to Lord Siva, is situated on the nearby hills towards the right side of river Vitasta. Locals frequently visited this shrine for offering prayers and simultaneously enjoyed the windy atmosphere during afternoons. Kotitirthamahatmya (Part of Bhringisha Samhita) describes in detail the essence of this Thirtha.There is a unique five feet long



Massive Shiv-Ling with sculptured faces at Fateh Garh Shree Baramula

Shivalingum with a face engraved on it, which lies within Sanctum santorum of the Shrine. Dharmsahala and the temple are presently managed by CRPF. There is a spring, the water of which gives hot sensation in winter and cold in summer. To the right of this temple is another shrine called Ganganor, which contains a spring with source believed to be at Koti tirth.

FATEHGARH RUINS: A small village on Ure-Baramula road, called Fathgarh is about 3 km away from Baramula. It is the site of the ruins of a very big temple, which had been the pride of the place in the past. But the insane elements destroyed this shrine of great importance and left hardly any trace behind except a colossal Siva-linga to lament upon. Close examination of the place reveals that except Ling, the site has been cleared of visible proof. Of-course, excavation may yield some clues. As regards the large platform, which some locals confirm, existed till recently. It had a lotus moulding and the space around that served as pradakshina.



The close study of lingum in its entirety reveals that it must have been huge cylindrical stone a central lingum pilliar out of which five separate headed massive bodies with their backs resting against central pillar like lingum had been carved out, giving it a unique look of probably Panchmukhi Siva. Some of the heads and body parts are defaced or detached or else missing. Portion of this huge figure in stone is half buried in the ground and the visible portion above has unfortunately been left to itself in to the open with wild grass and plant growth all around? There is no protection to it from sun, rain and other agents of weathering.



Kani Maaj Bhagwati on the banks of Vitasta at Baramula

For the moment, we may ignore the sentiments of the people, especially those who worship Lord Shiva, there is hardly any justification in dumping this beautiful and priceless specimen of art and craftsmanship this way. There is not even the pathway to reach it. It is really unfortunate that even the department of Archaeology has put up a face of a blind man with deaf and dumb attitude. They have failed in preserving the spirit that the sculptor had induced into the stone while shaping it into a Lingum. It ought to have been a subject of immense interest to the students of fine Arts. The authorities should have taken great care of such an artifice. But then, land having become so costly and radicalisation so common that it is a valid reason to see these objects wiped off at any cost.

KANI MAAJ: - A big rock on the banks of Vitasta, at a small distance from Baramula on Baramula-Uri road, a famous shrine, where one can find the imprint of a cow's hoops; engraved on top surface of the rock by none other than Nature itself. People worship "Kanneh Maagh" personifying the cow as the mother goddess.

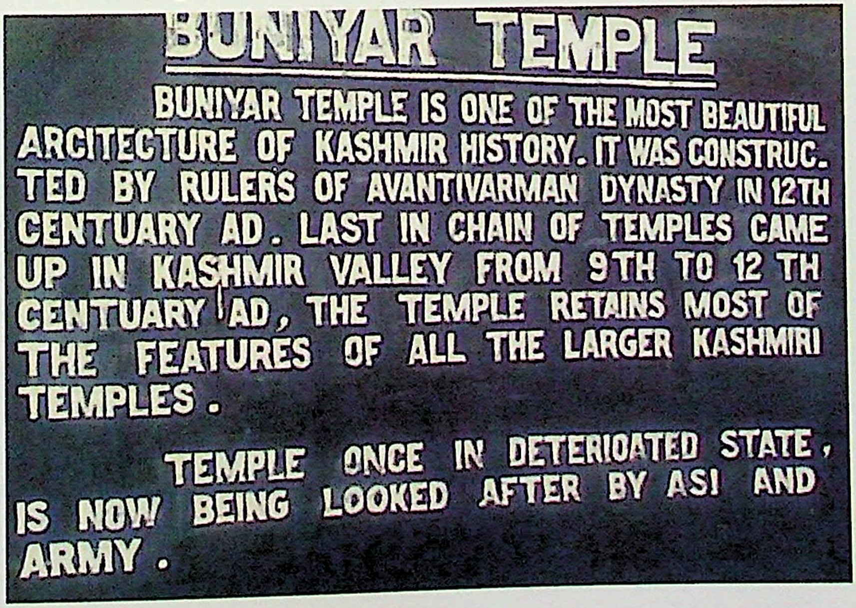
RUINS OF LORD VISHNU'S SHRINE: - Dilapidated structure named Muktasvamin is a temple dedicated to Lord Vishnu with Vihara and stupa along side, built by Lalitaditya. Kushan King Huvishka in 2nd century A.D had founded a city named after him as Huvishkapura at present, Ushkar/ Wushkur. (Ushkar/ Wushkur derived from Huvishkapura). Hsuan-Tsang, the noted Chinese pilgrim visited Kashmir in A.D.631, entered the valley via Baramula pass and spent a night at the monastery here.

TEMPLE AT BUNIYAR: - Nearly two miles before entering a village called Rampur on way to Uri has a temple structure in ruins but fairly in a well-maintained condition. The damage to the already dilapidated structure is visible because of the neglect of authorities in the past. Weathering has also taken its toll. Unless, the existing structure is taken care of, even ruins may crumble down and get reduced to heaps. Presently, the temple premise is looked after by the security personnel. Krishna was told that the temple had initially Vishnu image installed, but later on it was replaced by Siva-linga brought from the bed of the river Narbada. The temple has close resemblance with Wangath temple in structure. The upper base of the temple on the southern side has a projection, which serves as the spout. There was a Crocodile head shaped channel for carrying and

pouring water over the image during prayers. Immediately below used to be a water trough carved out of a single block of stone.



Temple at Buniyar in Baramula District



DHATHA MANDIR OR THE BANDI TEMPLE:- The Temple ruins, two to three kilometers away from Mohora village, situated midway between Rampur and Uri, falling on the Rampur-Uri road, are known as Dhathamandir, or the Bandi temple. Towards the south-east side of this temple, on the hilly slopes are the remains of two more temple shrines, which are the replica of the main temple. The ruins suggest that this temple resembled Buniyar temple in style except that these do not possess any row of pillars.

NARANTHAL:- A village on the right bank of Vitasta river about 3.5 Km from main town of Baramula, has a small ancient temple shrine, built of slate, said to have been existing in a tank, with a source spring within the premises. People would perform prayers/ puja here, but at present there is no visible trace of tank and only the superstructure of the temple is seen above the ground. The shrine has only one arched entrance on the east side. The topmost stone of the roof has a circular mortice, centre of which must have been intended for holding the finial, crowning the apex of the pyramid.

NANDKISHOR AT SERU:- Seru, is a village in sopore, famous for an important Hindu Shrine, Nandkishor Bharava's Asthapan. People performed hawans and offered sacrifices to Lord Shiva, the Bharava for well-being of individual as well as of the society. The temple had number of Dharmshallas and people visiting the shrine would stay in these inns / Dharmshallas for days together. They had great faith in the deity of the shrine. People would celebrate various auspicious occasions in the shrine. They would present themselves before the deity, evey time they faced problems. They had a firm belief that their problems would be resolved. More often, they would be blessed with expected results. Sometimes people would hire Doongas from Srinagar to visit and perform yagnas at the place. After migration, the shrine suffered a great damage, but people did not lose their faith in Bharava and they have started going there once again. Nandkishor-Bharava at Seer is also known as Bodh Nandkishor. There was a custom of slaughtering/ sacrificing a sheep after Hawan Ahuati was concluded at the shrine. Nandkishor Bharava has his abode at Sumbal also. People expecting some boon from the deity, would also visit the abode of Bharava at Sumbal as soon as their wishes were fulfilled. People say that this shrine was once destroyed by Shamas-ud-din Araki, he even burnt other Hindu temple structures of the area, but then these structures were

reconstructed sometime later, while Araki's tomb at Zadi-bal is no more in existence and most of the people even not know his name.

FIROZPOR-DRANG:- Drang, a term used in pre-Muslim periods to indicate a frontier customs duty collection centre, Firozpor name probably adopted, because of Nala flowing through the place. Formerly, it was known by the name of Karkota-Drang. The collection centre controlled movements of travellers travelling along Tosamaidan–Punch route (Kashmiri Prunts; Ancient Parnotsa.).The village contains ruins of a small temple, similar to Narastan temple, its cealing also seems to be of Narastan type.

OTHER IMPORTANT TEMPLES AND RELIGIOUS SITES:- There is a place called Sita-Haran, wherefrom it is believed that Ravana made Sita hostage and flew with her to Lanka. A spring containing scattered pieces of desecrated Idols of Lord Ram, Sita Mata and Lakshmana, earlier installed at the place from time memorials, remind people of the atrocities committed by Jehadis.

THE TEMPLE AND VIHARAS AT ANDARKOT:- Viharas and temples built by the King Jayapida are nowhere to be seen these days. The place was called Jayapura. (Details of Temple site have been discussed separately.)

GARUR TEMPLE:- The small mediaeval Siva temple with its roof having disappeared and base buried in the ground, it is situated at Garur, a small village on the shores of Wular Lake. (Site details are given separately.)

BHADRA-KALI ASTHAPAN:-. One can have darshans of Bhagwati Bhadra Kali, by footing a distance of hardly a kilometer from wadipora, a village in Handwara District. The Asthapan is situated in a thick forest area, on the slope of a hill. There is big tree inside the Asthapan, of which no-body had the permission to cut a branch or pick up even a fallen leaf. People offered Chotth to the deity on particular days. A Dharamshalla built for yatris has probably been burnt after migration, but as per reports, the Jawans of the Indian Army have constructed a new Dharmshalla and have also erected stairs straight up to the temple/ Devisthal. It is a wonderful place for meditation as there is wild growth of plants all around. In-fact, a dense forest on the slopes which abound in wild beasts.

TIKKER ASTHAPAN AND SWAMI NAND LALJI:- Tikker famous for being one of the abodes of Kheer Bhawani. Bhagwati Shama, after her arrival from Lanka preferred her stay at Tikker for some time. Later on, she moved to Tulamulla in Gandarbal, where she held her Darbar.

Tikker is also known for Swami Nand Lal Ji's Ashram. A brief account on the life of one of the greatest saints of our times is desirable here. It is said that Swami Nand Lal Ji and his Guru in Swami Lal Ji Chatanya Maharaj, a renowned saint of highest order had an accidental meeting, probably, at Zainapora. Very little is known about Guru Swami Lal Ji's childhood, except that he belonged to a well to do family from Abtabad, now in Pakistan. He had had his schooling in his native place. Since, there was a religious environment prevailing in his family. From very early age, religious thoughts had greatly influenced Swami Lal ji's mind which lateron developed in him the quest for probing in to the secrets of nature. Banaras being the great centre of learning, he left his home to live in the company of great sages and Sadhus of Banaras. Soon, he attained the bliss and turned in to a refind soul and a man of great intellect. He would frequently visit North India, especially, Kashmir valley. He had his disciples in Kupwara, Sopore, Baramula and Srinagar.

KHEER BHAWANI ASTHAPAN AT TIKKER:



Mata Kheer Bhawani Asthapana Tikker

After meeting his disciples, he would stay at Lalpora in Kupwara. During one such visit, he happened to meet Swami Nand Lal Ji. It was perhaps a pre-destined meeting of two great saints, who had lot many things in common. Thus, Swami Nand Lal ji found his guide / Guru in Swami Lal Ji chatanya. Lal Ji had acknowleged the requisite qualities of a deserving disciple in Swami Nand Lal ji and thus blessed him by handing over his treasure of knowledge, which he made use of while serving the suffering masses in accordance with the directions of his Guru. Swami Lal ji was proud of and had full faith in his disciple and would at sometimes say that Nand Lal can move mountains and drink oceans. Swami Lal Ji was a great Durga Upasak. He composed famous Durga Sapthshi. (It may be mentioned here that Swami Nand Lal Ji and Swami Nand Baba Maharaj (Nand Mooth) are two different saintly entities. Nand Baba was from Nunnar. He had shifted first to Pursheyar and then to Karannagar; Swami Kash Kak was his Guru. Swami Nand Baba was a Malang/ Mastana, who would predict future happenings irrespective of whether you liked it or not. He was educated and petition writing was his profession. Once while writing a petition paper of a client, he pronounced the judjment of the case on the petition paper itself, for he could not see his client suffer for long, which irritated the Judge. This resulted Nand Baba to leave the profession once for all. He would often wear hat, nikker and shirt and could enter any shrine at will irrespect of religion it belonged.) So far as Swami Nand Lal Ji is concerned, he was a Yogi, who with his divine bliss served thousands of suffering people. It may be of great interest to know about Swami Nand Lal Ji's early life. He was born in 1902 at Gurgari Mohalla, located between Zaina-Kadal and Ali-Kadal, in down town area of Srinagar city. His father Pt. Sahaj Koul came from a wealthy family, called Kothidars/ Kouls. Swami Nanad Lal Ji's grand father had so much of wealth that even Maharaja Pratap Singh Ji would at times seek loan from him.The entire family had been the worshippers of Sharika Devi and would often be seen as the part of Prabhat Pharie. Swami Ji lost his mother, when he was still a child. Father Pt. Sahaj Koul solemnized second marriage. Mal-treatment at the hands of step-mother put Swami Nand Lal ji on the path of a sanyasi and thus in a way parental neglect proved a blessing in disguise for him.

Swami ji left his home never to return. For twenty long years no body knew his whereabouts. Wandering from place to place, he

reached Zaina pora, near Bumie. During those days there used to be a big Ashram at Zaina-pora village. The Ashram would attract great rush of sadhus and sanyasis, who while on their pilgrimage to Sharda Devi, would have a stay here. Swami Nand Lal ji spent 35 years of his life first at Zainapora and later on at Bumie. He made a small hut/ Kutiya in an orchards belonging to Dass family. As mentioned earlier, at Zainapora Ashram, he met his Guru Lal Ji Maharaj. From here he started his Sadhna. He shifted to Sharda Mata Asthapan and stayed there till partition of the country in 1947. It is said that while the Ashram at Tikker was under construction, Swami Ji instructed his Sevaks not to harm any snake or scorpion, if sighted during digging. While digging, they found a Kangri, a chilim, Dooni containing ash and some fresh flowers. Among the diggers was a Sevak named Niranjan, who was lame by one leg. Swami ji would humoredly call him Noorlangya. One day he said to him "How can I tell you the value of this place or what it means to me". Perhaps, he was connected to this place somehow. Swami Ji inaugurated the ashram in1953. He had thousands of devotees, which included, Kral Baba, Vibeshan ji, Mast Baba and others. Though, he had chosen his successor, in-charge of the Ashram, in Bebeshan ji, but he loved Kral Bab the most. He had full faith in his ability and knew that he could deliver the goods on his own. Swami Nand Lal ji after undertaking the most difficult pilgrimage of Mansarover breathed his last on Gowri Tithi in 1968 in the house of one of his disciples Sh. Prem Nath Ji sadhu at Delhi. From here shift from Tikker to Vankore becomes somewhat unavoidable.

A village called Vankore can be reached from Baramula via two alternative routes, one being a hilly track, about two and a half Kms from Baramula, while the other linking the two places with a pacca road of approimately six kms in length. The reference to this place is available in Raj-tarangni.The name of the place finds mention in Puranas as well. It is said that there was a king named Vikont. He was brave, wise and just king. He had religious bent of mind. He was the ardent follower of Maa Ganga and would daily offer worship at her ghat. When the King grew old, he went in to a dense forest to seek the ultimate truth. Leaving the administrative responsibility of his kingdom to the charge of somebody else, he started vigorous meditation. He always wanted to be face to face with Ganga Mayia/ Choti-Ganga. But as his limbs stopped working properly, he pleaded

before Goddess Ganga that henceforth he may not be able to offer his routine prayers at the ghats. Ganga Mata knew that he could hardly live without having Her Darshans. She told him that henceforth he would not have to take trouble of visiting the ghat as She would Herself come to see Her devotee. The place where Raja Vikont had built his hut, had pile of stones lying at one end, Ganga jal started oozing under the heap and thus the place turned as beautiful as heaven, (the Vykuntha). Lateron there appeared innumerable springs and thus people started living in the vicinity of these springs. The dense Jungle on the hills developed in to the city in its bossom, which was named Vykuntpora after the King Vikont. Now its distorted name is Vankuth or Vankore. Swami Kral Baba Ji, who was initially tutored by his mother, later on by his Purohit, Swami Anand Baba Ji followed by Shredhar Joo Mastana and Sadhe Bab ji, while his last Guru, had yet to come. Destiny played its role and so one day when he had the occasion of accompanying one of his sick relatives to Swami Nand Lal Ji's ashram at Hushur; he experienced something like miracle happening at the sight of Swami ji. Yet again, on a different occasion, he along with his close associate Posh Baba set out to meet Swami Nand Lal ji. Both of them had tasted fish before leaving for ashram. When they reached and were about to enter the door, Swami Nand Lal ji is said to have scolded them by questioning their intent of setting out of their home for visiting an ashram with bellies filled with tamsic food. Kral Baba, then known by the name of Bagh Lal, gave a curt reply. He addressed before Swami ji without any hesitation that they did not know it was a sin to visit the ashram after consuming meat or fish, which brought a smile on the face of Swami Nand Lal Ji. He told Posh Baba that Bagh Lal was truly a Mastana (Toth Mooth) and he was rich in karmas and had muscle to spend as much of tamsic food as he liked, but Posh Baba could hardly afford to take such a liberty. This was the start of Guru Chehla relationship between Swami Nand Lal Ji and Kral Baba, He would now spend most of the time at Hushur ashram. He was to look after the ashram Langer. This continued till Swami Nand Lal Ji left for heavenly abode. Some time later, both Kral Baba and Posh Baba left the ashram. Kral Bab established his new ashram at Vankore. Like his Guru, Swami Nand Lal Ji, Kral Baba could not see people in pain or facing trouble. Whosoever came to seek his help and guidance, he would never hesitate in providing the necessary assistence.

VISIT TO ABINAV GUPT CAVE/ BHARVE GUPHA:- Kral Baba in the year 1980 was one day told by one of his devotee from Nagam village in Budgam District, about the existence of a wonderful Bharve cave. Kral Baba showed his eagerness to visit the cave.Kral Baba ji and his party of disciples, after covering a distance of eleven Kms on Tonga, reached the cave site. Immediately there after, he told his followers that they could go inside the cave with a guide, leaving him there. But the followers did not move, till Baba Ji agreed to accompany them.

They had a guide in Abdul Ahad Dar, one amongst the members of a family, who knew the secret routes within the cave. Kral Baba sufferred some minor injuries as he had to bend and turn his body repeatedly while moving on zig-zag routes within the cave. After travelling a distance of nearly half a km, they finally reached a place, which had an open space and from here they could see a crevice. However they noticed a pathway on the left of crevice, the entire party followed this path. Covering a further distance of 500 metres, they arrived at a circular shaped place, where they found a Shivling over which water from the roof of the cave was trickling down, a sight that only nature can create. People say that Abhinav Gupta took samadhi here at this spot. When the visitors came out of the cave, Kral Baba seemed to have been badly hurt. He offered Rupees twenty one to the guide, who willingly accepted the money. Thereafter, the party left for Nagam. Early next morning, when Baba Ji had yet to have his break fast, there was a sudden knock at the door. As the door opened; every body was taken by surprise on finding Abdul Ahad at the gate breathing heavily. He had covered the distance of 12 km on foot just to return the money to Kral Baba. The man had seen pious woman in his dreams. Who had threatened him of dire consequences in case he did not return the money that he had charged for serving as a guide to Baba Ji and his party. He, infact, gave the descrption of women riding on a Lion with sword in one hand, trident in another, besides various weapons and objects in rest of Her hands, which defined all the attributes of mother Goddess. While Kral Baba was not ready to take the money back, Abdul Ahad insisted that he would not leave unless he is forgiven for his folly. The Abhinava cave is approximately 36 Km away from Srinagar, situated between the villages of Beerwah (old name, Bohroop) and Sonpaw (old name, Soranbashi), eleven kms from Nagam. The inner structure of this Cave is so complicated that it is risky to go inside

without a proper guide.This Cave structure is different from Bremzoo cave. It is a naturally occurring cave.It is said that Abhinava Gupta along with his twelve hundred devotees attained nirvana in this Bharva cave.

ABINAVA GUPT, THE GREAT ORIGINATOR:- It would be desirable to give a brief introduction of Abinava, the greatest exponent of Kashmir saivism. (The Master originator of Advita philosophy/ Monistic-Saiva philosophy), A Non-Dualistic Saivist, an ardent Advita philosopher, author of works like Siva (Bhairava) stotras/ Bodanpan Cadasika, his original piece of work and core of Kashmir Saivism and then Great Master's masterpiece "Tantraloka", Abinava Gupt has also to his credit a commentary on Bhagwad Gita, where at the end of each verse, he declares that God realization cannot be achieved by self-imposed restrictions or by wasting time in controlling the Indrayas or the mind. He considers enjoyment without distraction, a catalyst assisting God realisation. He recommends relishing the creation of world for achieving His bliss. (World, according to him is a realilty and not delusion) Abinava Gupt believed that freedom from miseries can neither be attained by renouncing the world nor by harbouring hatred towards it, but by feeling one's existence as the part of Almighty. He says when man is His creation, he is in Him, whether He is Siva, the Maheshwara the form of Maha-Kaal the creator or preserver, it makes no difference to Him or to His creation. One can do anything, but all his actions should be focused towards Lord. There is a war going on between sense organ and its object. Lust fights detachment, detachment fights the lust. Sorrow fights happiness and vice-versa, one has to witness this fight and not get entangled. He says if one gets attached with objective world, the result shows that he becomes detached, but if he gets detached from objective world, he is ultimately found to be attached to it. It is no use living lonely in a cave, when one is reminded of the comforts of home every now and then. One should always be stable, whether in joy or in sorrow. Dedication and devotion takes one to a stage where Lord Himself takes care of devotee's anxieties. He, who finds revealing nature in happiness or sorrow, breathes every breath in His name, he is in one with Him. Abinava Gupt says that for any thought or action coming from mind or senses, one should follow the movements of mind or senses and then divert these towards the one's nature. He refers to Lord Krishna, who says that there are two elements in this universe, viz Prakriti and Purusha, when one is conscious and

inactive the other active and un-conscious, but then the union of the two creates the world, where both fuse to become one element. Abhinavgupta says that a yogi, who is attached to God, can not have an ego. He believes that meditation should not be time, place, vibration or condition specific, for these conditionalities devoid a person of God realization. He says if yogi has total control over lust and sexual desires, he can have no sense or knowledge of sexual pleasure. He adds that simply by cleaning and washing of a body does not make one a yogi. It is only attachment, love and devotion for Lord that unites him with Him. On realization of God–consiousness, he says activity remains the same, but fruit is unique. Now, dynamics tells Krishna to continue the journey.

SEDH OR SADHU GANGA: - A shrine, where a saint, named Sedh Mol, the resident of Lar Ganderbal, had not only the Darshnas of Harmukh Ganga, but was even blessed with her nector right at the place of his tapa. It is said that Sedh-Mol had a Guru, who directed him to perform tapa at Devnal in the forests of Handwara, falling under the then district Kupwara, but taking Devernar for Devnal, he completed 11 years of tapasya, only to find that the place where he had meditated was not Devnal. It was with the help of woman called Bakhat Ded belonging to a Muslim Magrey family, that he was shown the path to Devnal. He blessed the lady with sehdyi/ a virtue of curing the suffering masses. At Chogal village, he entered the compound of some one and asked for Nalchot Mala as biksha/ alms. Meanwhile, he reached the banks of river Pohru and from there he found an access to holy Harmukh Ganga at will, of-course, with the help of Mala as professed by his Guru. Later on Ganga Maiya is said to have allowed him the liberty of tasting the jal while sitting in his kutiya'. As a routine, when crows started crowing in the earlier morning hours, he would get up and simply dig a hole to collect water. One fine morning, when he woke up, he found Ganga jal flowing out of his Kamandle half buried in the ground, but the saint asked for limited flow for maintenance of the sanctity of the nectar. The place had exceedingly beautiful surroundings and had good tourist potential as well.

KAREWAS OF PARASPOR AND DIVAR: - (Parihasapora and its ruins, once capital city of Great King Lalitaditya Mukhta Peedh, who reigned Kashmir from 883 to 902 is worth description. Krishna visited Patan village, but did not dare to approach the site directly,

as access to spot in view of the prevailing militant activity was fraught with risk. Visiting such places personally gives better insight. The place is slighly raised and contains ruins of an ancient city, a glimps from a bus, gives an idea of great grandeur of bygone days.

SUGANDHESA TEMPLES:- Sugandhesa temples at Sankarapurapattan, presently known as patan, was erected by King Sankaravarman and Sugandha his queen during his reign. It offers a wonderful peep in to the glorious past of the land of Rishis. Details will follow separately.



Ruins of Temples on road side in Patan





GANGE JATTAN: - An important tirath in a village called Bunhama on Beeru-Budgam road. The pilgrimage to this tirath is auspicious and essential for a Kashmiri Hindu, especially for those, who failed to visit Gangbal. Here, the water trickles down the clay lumps in the form of Jattas only on Ganga Ashtami.

PUSHKAR TIRATH: -Another sacred tirath is Pushkar. There are only two tiraths of the same name in the entire country, where only Lord Brahma is worshipped. Both these Tirthas are directed west-wards, one at village Pushkar in tehsil Beerwah district Badgam, between Khag (Beeru) and Ferozpora (Tangmargh) in Kashmir and another at Ajmer in the state of Rajasthan.The yatra to Pushkar (in Kashmir) starts with a dip in the holy spring at the start of Amavasya, followed by parikramas of holy spring, the yatra culminates at Sangam near a village, Chhandil Wanigam Tangmarg, fifteen km walk with seven stops at Garud Ashram, Nagbal, Hams Dwar, with three springs at Sangam. People also perform shradha ceremony of their ancestors at this place. There may be other important site on or off the route to Srinagar, but from Patan, Krishna moved to Sumbal then to Waskur, Waskur to Manigam and from there to Kangan in District Ganderbal, before returning to Srinagar city via Telbal. The diversion was intended to re-visit Naran-nag/ Wangath, a village in Kangan, with number of ancient temples, presently in ruins, the importance of their special style of

architectural designs, would need some elaboration, but lack of technical details hinders the probe. A simple peep reveals that these temples have distinct entrances pattern. However, giving minute details of these temples are rather beyond the scope of this book. Moving along Sindu Nadi, there are number of important shrines like, Ganesh shilla within Sindhu Nadi at Hari Ganeshvan.



(Note:- Hari-Ganeshvan is most beautiful place on the banks of River Sindhu located some distance from Wayel bridge. Ganesh shilla in the middle of the river, is exactly shaped like elephant head. With red lead paste on, it gives truly an aesthetic look.) Like-wise, temples and shrines enroute Wayel- Ganderbal- Shalimar route; are temples at Nunner, Manigam, Bhavanishori and Ishbar which are worth visiting.

BHAWANISHORI TEMPLE AT CHANNDAPORA, HARWAN: - A temple at channdapora, Harwan called Bhavanishori Asthapan, has a great historical importance because of Vasu Gupt. Harwan village is also important so far as Buddhism in Kashmir is concerned. The name Harwan seems to have been derived from, Hari meaning Goddess Sharika or Parvati and Wan, the jungle. Bhavanishori has taken an abode in a temple surrounded by a spring, probably; the place that had been a part of jungle in distant past.

The water coming out of the spring forms a streamlet which irrigates fields before joining probably the TaelbalNalla. The people of Channdpora managed this shrine and would perform yagna annually. It is in-fact, the initial base camp for ascending Mahadev, especially for locals. (The descriptions of number of shrines have not been taken up strictly in the order of their location. There are plausible reasons for it. Now, Krishna was turning towards the city of Srinagar. So far as the outer parts south of Srinagar are concerned, there are number of temples and shrines, but for ensuring sequencial order, let the selection of shrines be made as per the stops /Padavas of Amarnath yatra.). Sadhus start yatra from Dakshmi Akhara, visit Ram temple in Sathu Barber Shah and then move along Choonthkol to Babha Dharm Das's temple, from there they go to Gooni Khanh Mandir, or to Durga-Nag temple on the foot hills Shankaracharya temple or Zeeshta Devi Asthapan for a night stay.

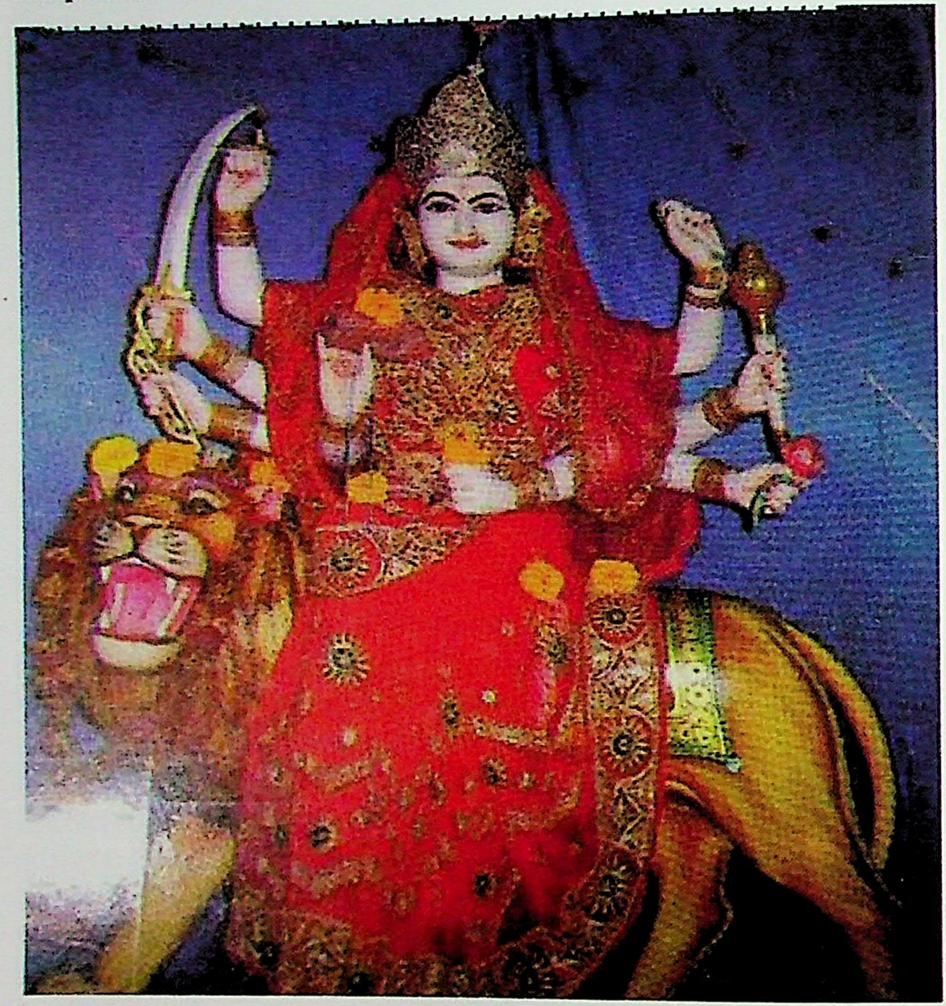
THE ASTHAPAN OF ZESHT BHAGWATI: — It is one of the most frequently visited Devisethal these days. Prior to migration people would offer puja on five consecutive Thursdays, which usually fall in the months of Zaeteth and Ashadh of Hindu calander. It is perhaps one of the beautiful temple sites in Srinagar. Governor's House being in its vicinity at Gupkar, it comes in the safest Zone and as a result of it, people in bulk have started visiting the temple of Goddess Zeeshta Devi on regular bases. It has unique location because of being in the lap of Zabarvan / Zaeshtashvara hills, with full view of Jheel Dal in the front; it is surrounded by forests. Rarest variety of fruit plants are found in abundance and the area is inhabited by quite a good number of wild animals. Shankaracharya temple on a separate hill top lies on its left and is an added attraction for devotees of Lord Shiva. A temple, housing a huge Shivling shifted lately from Ganpathyar, has recently been constructed along with Dharmshallas. A night Jagran in a shed, in front of a small temple within the spring, the abode of Goddess Zeeshta, provides an aesthetic experience. There used to be a big well on the upper side of the temple site, which would contain snow stored lasting up to summer months. Children would ascend the hill for visiting pari-Mahal. Another temple about a km from this place is dedicated to Roopa Bhawani.



Zesht Bhagwati at Zeehthyar, near Governor House, Gupkar

DURGA-NAG TEMPLE: -There is a temple on the foot hills of Shankracharaya, which stands with its base mounted on a spring. It used to be secluded place a few decades ago. A saint named Shiv Rattan Giri came here in early twentith century. He established a trust for the proper maintenance of the temple shrine. He had to put in great struggle to win the battle. In-fact, he fought an agitation single handedly and gave the shrine a shape that it deserved. After independence, the situation changed dramatically. Major portion of the trust land was grabbed by the group of people responsible for establishing shopping complexes and auto-repairing centres.The evil designs of certain people not only polluted the purity, serenity and sanctity of the entire area, but did encourage the population shift around almost on three sides of the foot hills of the Shankaracharya, which has destroyed the entire scenic beauty of the place. A simple look at the foot hills from Dal side, fills one with great remorse, for there are big mansions built everywhere. People have carved out land pieces out of the base of the hill, decreasing the width of hill at rapid rate and if the trend is not stopped in right earnestness, it may lead to serious ramification. A view from the top of the hill, reminds you of Malkha, a vast piece of the excavated land at the foot

of the hill has been turned in to a grave yard. It would have been better to allot a separate piece of land for the purpose somewhere in more secluded area. Accommodating people may have been a compulsion in view of increasing population in this area.



Durga Bhagwati Idol at Durga-Nag Temple foot hills of Shankaracharya

But then the place demanded a better deal at the hands of men, especially those who claim having inherted this vale of beauty by virtue of being born here. Let them understand that this planet belongs to all but none in the end. Krishna recalls that he in the company of his cousins (of same age group), would usually climb Shankracharya hill from Durga-Nag side, especially, on the night before Shravan Poornimashi, when pilgrimage to other places like

Hareshur, Mahadev, Dyanshur, Thajvoor or Amarnath ji would not be a feasible preposition on account of their approaching exams.He recollects the enjoyment they would derive visiting Durga Nag temple, where thousands of people would throng to have Darshanas of Godess Durga — something that they cherish even now. From here an automatic and inevitable feel of spirituality would prevail all around which would continue to persist, till the completion of Shiva Darshana within the temple on the Shankracharya hill. Most of the people preferred a night stay in Durga-Nag temple premises, where besides puja; Hawans and Samohic Aarti, the musical mandlies would give aesthetic colour to the occasion. The mela would last all through the night and for the entire Poornimashi day.

Those who preferred stay for night at Durga-Nag would start ascending the hill in the early morning hours, to escape rush and also for avoiding standing in long queue for hours before having Darshnas of Lord Siva at Shankaracharya temple. Krishna along with his fellow mates would leave from their home late in the Chaturdashi evening and before proceeding to Durga-Nag would witness a movie in third show at Khayam theatres. Lateron, they would foot the distance from theatre to the temple almost in fifteen minutes time. They would start playful games on the slopes of the hill, swinging their bodies on tree branches or playing with paper balls etc'. Hill slopes from recently constructed Suleaman complex on the right to the hotel buildings that have come up on left side of the temple, formed the part of the temple premises then. The worst part of the story is that those incharge of the shrine made the left over piece of land again a piece of business affair. More recently half of the remaining piece of land was sold to hotel owners and other half converted into a shopping complex, a great tragedy. Therefore, one misses the entire charm that one had had the chance to enjoy earlier, particularly, the scene when the hillock used to look like a bride on night before Shrawan Purnimashi, with electric lamps glowing everywhere, Bhajans being played on grammaphones and loud-speakers.(It may be interesting to note that Durga-Nag temple used to be the second paadav for Amarnath yatries. Certain people as part of their religious duty would carry a pot/ pitcher full of water on their shoulders from Durga-Nag temple to Shankracharya for providing drinking water to yatris as well as for holy bath of Lord Shiva's lingum). The descent of the hill would take hardly fifteen to twenty minutes.



Shankaracharya Temple



Shankaracharya Temple Gate, before ascending stairs

SHANKARACHARYA TEMPLE: -There are various texts to guide people regarding the historical back ground of Shankaracharya temple. So far as the site and the structure of temple is concerned, it is so located on the top of the hill that it is easily visible from almost all the sides of the city, even from hidden areas on the eastern side, which forms mountainous ranges. Whether it is Dal Lake / Rainawari side, Nishat Bagh, Chattabal or even the places like Pandrethan and beyond, Lord Shiva's temple on the summit, a Lingum like structure is installed in such a way that it clearly depicts the foresight



Shiv Ling at Shankaracharya Temple

and the architectual skill of the architect. During ancient times the hill was known as Gopadri hill and obviously the temple the Gopadri temple, which can find connecting traces in the present day Gupkar, the place lying in the vicinity of the hill. Kalhana in his book Rajtarangini states that King Gopaditya built a shrine of

Jyeshthesvara on Gopadri hills during his reign, but then this temple shrine got built and rebuilt and repaired atleast on three occasions as per available texts. Whether the present structure of temple is the same as referred to in Rajatarangini that existed a century or so prior to the coming up of Martand temple structure needs proper study, As per available sources, the temple site has been there before the arrival of Adi-Guru Shankaracharya in Kashmir, but in a dilapidated condition and it was Adi- Shankra, who rebuilt the temple of Jyesthesvara in a record period of time and established it as the centre of religious activity, a mini-Muth. The matchless specimen of Kashmir architecture in the form of temple is something that the Srinagar city identifies itself with.

Before moving towards the sourthern region, it would be appropriate to visit the important shrines / temple places in the city, the description of which was left out earlier, because these preceded the ghat (location-wise), from where the Dunga journey to Tulmula had started. For instance, Drabhyar and purshyar temples though not so big but of great importance to the people of the immediate localities, who would spend most of their leisure time within these temple premises. The people would start their day with offering puja and pouring water over the Shivling. Festivals were celebrated collectively in these temples; even for extra-ordinary happenings, meets would be held within temples and management consulted for providing needful assistance. These temples were properly managed and maintained by people prior to migrations. There were big ghats attached to these temples, where people gathered in large numbers. One would usually find people of all ages taking bath and doing little bit of stunts while swimming. Amongst other important temples in the neighbouring areas were, one temple at Tankipora, called Katlishour Bhareva. This temple is presently maintained by a local Sanyasi of Prabhu Padha/ Hari-Krishna- Hari-Rama sect. Shivallya ashram (Rama Krishna Ashram):- This ashram is being run by an ardent devotee of Vivekanad, Prof. B. L. Koul by name, who has been managing the entire ashram, after migration of Kashmiri pandits, single handedly. Besides dedicating his services to Vivekananda Kendra, he has donated his entire life time earnings for maintaining as well as providing of the facilities that every devotee visiting the shrine would feel proud of. Professor Koul has been living a life of perfect sanyasi, having denounced every thing for serving

suffering masses. He never moved out of the ashram even during turmoil/ peak militancy period of 1990-1995 and helped the needy and injured people irrespective of their affliations. He has been instruemental not only in renovating but also purchasing the portion of the shrine land under occupation of other Sansthas to whom he had to pay huge money as cost of land and thus gave ashram a real look of a shrine where one finds peace and tranquility. The ashram is also known for Shivalaya, a lingum of unique beauty with fissures at the top once you pour water on its sheesha, it seems as if Ganga has emerged from Jattas of Lord Shiva. There is a big prayer hall where Idols of Swami Rama Krisha, Shardha Mata and Vivekanada are installed. Prior to migration there used to be a library and a dispensary, where devotees would study and doctors would treat and investigate the cause of diseases the patients were suffering from, free of cost. Ashram had a sample testing lab of its own for testing blood and urine samples. There was a reading room, where one could find study material available. All reference books, important National and local dailies with important magazine were made available for readers free of cost. It continued till late nineties but library and reading room had to be closed in the very year of turmoil.

TEMPLE ON KHUTEH-KULH:- There is a Shiva temple at Shallayar, Kanikadal. People in the vicinity preferred offering morning prayers either at this temple or at Shivaal-Sabhun Asthapan The temple on Khutehkul was mostly visited by people living in poaot Bazar and Kani-Kadal suiting the devotees distance-wise and those living in Tankipora up to Shergadhi, Katlishour Bharove temple was most frequently visited temple. On to the other side of Haba-Kadal; temples worth description are most important temples that of Razdan-Kocha, Kaziyar temple, Soomyar and Mallyar- Kharyar.

SOOMYAR TEMPLE has been a centre of various religious-cum-social activities. In-fact, it was spacious and had a big hall, where discourses on Geetaji would be conducted on regular bases. Functions were held here, especially, on Soomri Amawasiya, Chandan shehsti, Janam Ashtmi and other important festivals.

MALLYAR TEMPLE:- In this temple of Goddess Durga, Bhagwan Gopinathji's ashram was established after his Nirvana. Since, the installation of Bhagwanji's Murti, the temple as well as the ashram has become a centre of great socio-religious activities.

This in turn has resulted in the development of this place of worship presently maintained by a trust in the name of Shri Bhagwan Gopi Nathji Trust, doing an admirable job, especially, for the upliftment of poor & needy children and women, in particular, widows who are rehabilated irrespective of their caste, creed, or colour. Before moving further on, it would be appropriate to have the glimpses of the life of this great saint of recent times. A contemporary of Swami Nand Babaji (Mastan), Bhagwan Gopi Nathji was born on 3rd July, 1898, in a financially poor but otherwise very respectable family from Bana-Mohalla/ Haba-Kadal, Srinagar. He lost his mother Haarmali, when he was only 12 years old. He must have been in his mid-twenties when his father, Pandit Narayan Joo also left for heavenly abode. Having given up all his possessions during his life time, Pt. Narayan Joo had left no permanent house for his family to live in. Consequently, Bhagwanji had to move from one rented house to another along with his two sisters and two brothers. However, Kak family, from Sathu Barber Shah, adopted younger of his two brothers, Pt. Jai Lal Kak by name, who was brought up in the lap of luxuary. He was an overseer by profession. Though an honest man to the core, he had enough and to spare. He got married to a girl named Danwati/ Tulsimali from Rishi Parivaar. But the couple had no surviving child.Kak sahib by nature was true devotee of Siva and His consort and would always be absorbed in performing religious activities, an inherent quality in his genes. People say that he had turned his home almost into a Langer for sadhus, faqueers, needy as well as relatives and neighbours. Pt. Jai Lal Kak not only loved feeding human beings, he had the similiar attitudes for animal and birds. They say that one could see this man in early morning hours feeding tiny birds. multi-coloured birds, including Bulbuls, who would not hesitate sitting and enjoying feed on his palms. He would regularly offer bread to stray dogs and cows. He had also involved himself in constructing of temple at Sathu-barber-shah. It is said that he would secretly donate to the cause of orphans and widows. Before his death he himself performed Karmkanda both for his wife and himself. During eleven days of hawan, he donated all he could, performing religious ceremonies prescribe daans and donations, viz; Gau-daan and Bhumi-daan etc.

BACK TO BHAGWANJI, Bhagwanji was ardent upasak (Worshipper) of Goddess Sharika. He had a vision of Divine mother at the age of twenty seven. But he did not abandon his earthly ties

and continued to serve first as a compositor and then as a grocer at Chie-dobh near Chattabal. As shopkeeper, he lived on the margin, his wholesaler would offer him. He never allowed his beam to get tilted in his favour. In-fact, he worshipped his weighing pans lest it deceived his customer through the act of omission or commission of his hands. Despite the hardships, lack of resources and paucity of time, Bhagwan Ji acquired thorough mastery over various languages, like; Hindi, Sanskrit, Urdu, Persian and English. Babaji lived the life of a Brahmachari, but he was never averse to his disciples getting engaged in naptual ties.His spiritual discipline was based on meditation on supreme reality. His worship would start with Ganesh puja, Surya namsakar, offering Siva and Narayana puja, followed by Shakti puja, last but not the least the performance of the Panchaanga Upasana.



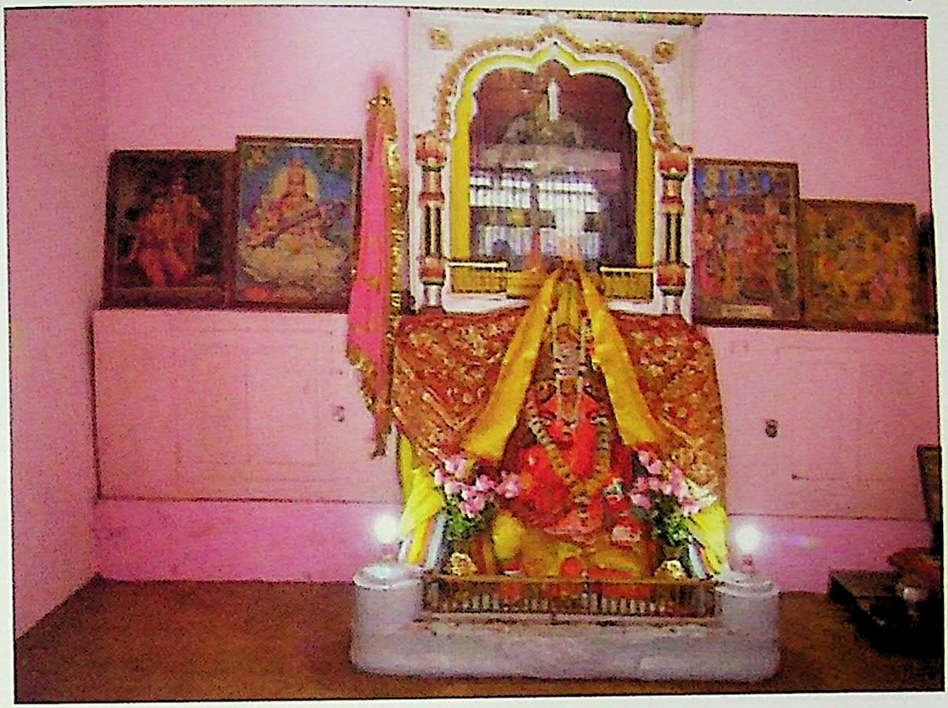
Bhagwan Gopi Nathji's Pratima at Kharyar Habba-Kadal

In later part of his life, (For nearly last two decades of his life), he lived with his niece at Chundhpora, Habba-Kadal. Sometimes, he would shut himself in a room and only his neice would have the permission to enter his room during such periods. He would talk less. As a matter of fact, his voice was hardly audible to strangers. Bhagwan ji always kept a dhooni / fire burning before him. He would

usually say, "Ahankaars Namaskar, Teeh Gaov Omkar." It is said that once a student, who was regular visitor to Bhagwanji, probably felt an urge of take the puff of afeem just for enjoyment sake. (Marajuna powder usually consumed by sadhus, but lately by addicts). Bhagwan ji could see through his trick. He wanted to teach the boy a lesson. He left a powdered pack, as if out of his sight, just to check the response of the boy towards it. The boy in a bid to hoodwink Bhagwan ji laid his hand on the packet and later tried to hide it inside his pharan. But no sooner did he do so; he observed some movements within his pharan. When he peeped inside through the collar of his pharan, he felt his heart sinking. He could not but cry. His throat choked. He fell straight at the feet of Bhagwanji, asking him to save his life from the snake. Bhagwanji wiped off his tears, consoled him but at the same time advised him not to risk his life in future just for the sake of a fun. The boy promised that he would never go in for such misadventures. Thereafter, he became Bhagwan ji's true devotee. It is said that Bhagwan ji had his disciples and devotees, who never had the chance to meet him during his life time. These included devotees from Australia, U.S.A, Canada, Switzerland and U.K. Some of the devotees claim that he was seen physically present alongside of Indian forces/ (Troops) guiding and directing them at warfronts. They say that he was a Tathva-gyaani (possessor of knowledge of all that has to happen or is happening). The people would organise satsangs and bhajans on Sundays at the place, where Babaji lived. Later on such functions were held at Kharyaar in a Temple, where Babaji's ashram was established in the year 1973. Musicians and singers of repute would participate in these satsangs, which included Late Vijay Mallaya. Babaji left for heavenly abode on Tuesday the May 28th 1968. Krishna is trying to reach out to each and every temple or shrines, left earlier, but because of inadequate feed back, the details given are no more than name of sites, like, temples in Razdan Kochha, on river ghats in the vicinity, Saraf-Kadal Mandir, Mandir Bagh, Sheetal-Nath and so many other temple- shrines.

GANPATHYAR TEMPLE:- A temple- shrine dedicated to Lord Ganesha, the deity, whose worship is most auspicious for initiating any sacred act. It is situated on the right bank of the river Vitasta, in between Amira Kadal and Habba Kadal. Devotees passing the road by the side of the temple would ensure a parikrama/ walk round the abode of Lord Ganesha, with Lord seated within the sanctum

sanctoria. For young students and children, the place had an added attraction, as they had the opportunity of tasting ladoos during evening hours which the devotees offered to the Deity almost daily.



Ganesh Temple at Ganpathyar Habba-Kadal

The purohit would distribute the sweets amongst all those visiting the temple. A fortnight festival of Ganesha would be celebrated here in Kashmir from first moon day to fourteenth of the month of Badherpeetha, with two days most aucipicious, viz Vinayak chaturthi and Anant/ Gana chodas/ Ganesh chodsi. However, no processions like in other parts of the country were taken out here. Preparation of Rhoth/ sweat bread, made out of flour mixed with sugar, milk, ghee and cardamom, either fried or baked using pan, would be offered to the Deity in puja during these auscipious days. This puja was also known as Beebh Garaz Maaghanz katha/ Rhoth puja in Kashmir, which involved offering of turf roots, flowers petals besides Rhoths/ sweat bread to Lord Ganesha. Almost all the families would perform this Pannh puja; where story/katha would be recited with devotion by any elderly male or female member of the family. There was a school named Vinayak School alongside of the temple, smaller institute than Lalh-Ded school, (A Hindu female institution on preceding ghat).

Typical names of localities or what people call Mohallas, situated near the banks of the river Vitasta, may entertain the readers, for these names usually end in Yars. For instance, Shurahyar, Badehyar, Ganpathyar, Mallahyar, Kharhyar,Saphiryar, Soomyar, Kaziyar, Sheshyar, Pursheyar, Drabyar, Dalhasanyar, Seheyar, and Battyar and so on and so forth. Almost all these places are represented by Shiva temples situated on the respective Ghats making the old city a very sacred place to visit. The details have been dragged in between for purpose of covering the Ghats up the river up to Gadhadharji temple.

GADHADHAR JI'S TEMPLE:- one of the most prominent temples in Amira-Kadal area, is Gadhadharji temple. It is situated on the left bank of the river within Old Secretriat premesis and adjacent to the building previously housing J&K Legislative Assembly. It is a beautiful temple with its Spire made of gold plated brass sheets. A black marble or perhaps a metallic Idol of Lord Vishnu of incomparable beauty is installed on right side besides a mini temple made of silver with Lord Rama seated in chariot lying within the sanctum santoria of the temple. The temple of Gadhadhar ji was a favourite tourist stopover previously for the people interested in enjoying the trip to down town area of the old city in a Shikara,

There is also a temple of Lord Hanumanji situated on the left bank of old Amira Kadal bridge, while on other side of the vitasta is another temple dedicated to Anand Ishwar Bhariva, which is surrounded by cluster of houses, built in an un-planned manner with narrow lanes here and there draining out the human excreta from every house for letting it flow in to Vitasta, a special feature of almost every part of old the city.

SHURAHYAR TEMPLE:- An ancient temple situated on vitasta at Sonawar, Badambagh, with temple structure not so important from archaeological point of view, but, of-course having a distinct historical background. Many men of letters and great religious scholars, who had the chance to visit the vale, especially, in connection with piligrimage to Amar Nath ji or even otherwise, have stayed here, as it had been one of the Pandavs/ stops for Sadhus accompanying Chaadi Mubaarik. Swami Vivekanand in recent times is said to have had a night halt here in this temple. Again an Akhara at Aabhi Guzher is one of the four Akharas of Sadhus in Srinagar,

though earlier there had been ten established Akhara. It may be interesting to note that the Akharas have management of their own, sadhus of any sect having allegiance to a particular Akhara, would at no cost stay in any other Akhara. The other three important Akharas including Dakshmi Akhara, where from Chaadi Mubarak or yatra to Amar Nathji would start on foot after Bhoomi-poojan on shravan panchmi, Hanuman Akara (Hanuman temple premises at Amira Kadal is one of the most frequently visited temples in Kashmir. It houses most beautiful idols of Lord Maha-Veera, Trimukhi Shivlinga, Siva-Parvati, Ganeesha and Kumara in separate temple on riverside, besides two mini-temples having idols Lord Rama- Sita-Lakshman in one and Radha-Krishna in other. The temple committee manages celebration of all important festival with fervor), Another Aakhara is perhaps Shri Chinar Akhara at Residency road. Sadhus would also stay at Ram chanderJi's temple in SuthooBarber Shah, Dharam Dass temple trust at Vishamber Nagar, Goni-khan temple, Anand Ishwar Bhairva temple at Amira Kadal and Durga-Nag temple at the foot hills of Shankaracharya respectively. Pilgrims, who liked to stay away from great hustle and bustle of city life, preferred to spend their time in Doongas, with comparatively low rates and almost the same comforts, anchored by Hanjees near Zero bridge or in the channel linking Dal with Vitasta. The atmosphere would be quite suitable for people interested in meditating while being face to face with Lord Siva.

PANDRETHAN TEMPLE: - Moving past the wonderful site of Shankaracharya or Durga-Nag area and following the National Highway, the reader automatically realizes that there is still a lot more to be seen. The southern part (Earlier Maraz region) is equally as enchanting as the parts of the vale already visited. Now, from Shurhayar temple onwards, there is a place called Pandrethan on Srinagar–Jammu road, hardly at a distance of one Km. from Badamibagh cantonment area. A well preserved mediaeval temple presently maintained by Army personnel. Obviously, the premises falls under protected area. Visitors are allowed entery only after seeking permission from the authority concerned. The plinth as well as the entire structure of this temple is antique in itself. Earlier, it would remain submerged for greater part of the year because of marshy land base, but now a beautiful landscape, a park for the visitors and channel surrounding the temple have come up, which gives a splendid look to the entire place. A remarkable feature of the

temple structure lies in, in the fact, that it has the string of elephants carved round the temple, upon which the walls of sanctum rest. The pond or the man made spring shaped round the structure seems not to have been there at the time the temple was built, for it had an extensive marshy land around, which was drained during construction. It is believed by some historians that the temple was built and dedicated to Lord Vishnu by Meruvardhana, the minister of Partha in the beginning of tenth century and the temple came to be known by the name of Vishnu- Meruvardhanasvami. However, others including Kalhana hold that the beautiful temple dedicated to Siva-Rilhanesvara was erected by Rilhana, the minister of Jayasimha, in 1135 A.D. So far as the history of the place called Pandrethan is concerned it is earlier than 1135A.D. The present name is distortion of the word Puranadhisthana, the old capital city, founded under the name of Srinagri by Ashoka the great in third century B.C. almost eight hundred years later Parvarasena II shifted the site of the capital city farther down the Vitasta and thus the old city was deprived of all its importance and even ascribed it the name of old city.

Alas, the remains of ancient Pandrethan consisting of level terraces, long lines of loose rubble walls, and innumerable mounds of stone debris, especially along the mountain slopes right from Pantchock to Shankaracharya, are hardly traceable anywhere these days.The excavations in the area on its eastern side, revealed that there were two Buddhist stupas and courtyard of monastery, half a mile away from the temple.

The party had continued the journey on National highway with a sole purpose of finding clues that could lead to ancient temple sites, Buddhist Viharas and Mosques of great architectural importance, en-route and off-the-route. After covering a distance of nearly ten kilometres on N.H, Krishna decided to take a turn just to visit the village Zaawan, wherefrom he once had an opportunity of climbing the Haershour cave. A brief description of his expedition-cum-prilgrimage to this cave, an abode of Haershour/ Siva, has been summed up here under.

VISIT TO ZEAWAN AND EXPEDITION TO HAERSHOUR:- Zeawan, a small village at the foot hills of Haershour, slightly off the National high way, has a well known ancient religious shrine situated

in it. There is a unique square shaped spring, interior of which is linned with stone slabs. Presumably, it represented a left over part of an ancient temple. Since, Krishna at the time of his first visit to the place had no idea of its historical importance. He would have definitely gathered the relevant details regarding the history of the place, had he known that such details would be of immense value lateron. It was not a study tour that time, but a casual trip, an occasion for celebration, a fesitivity accompanied by the feeling of joy that climbing gives on reaching the mountain top. On the auspicious night prior to Shravan Poornimashi he had set himself for seeking Darshanas of the most beautiful and naturally occuring lingum in the cave. He had to cover at least five hour mountainous journey before he could find entry into the cave from above, of-course, with the help of a heavy wooden ladder inserted in through the cave opening with its upper end supported by the entrance itself, while the lower end fixed in between the shallow stony crevaces within the floor of the cave. There was enough of space to accommodate five to six people at a time and they could perform puja and also light diyas without any problem, provided these pilgrims did not stay inside for long and the other people waiting for darshan would leave the opening at the entry point for free flow of air.The most wonderful thing one could see here was a long and comparatively thin cylindrical black stone lingum with uniform girth slightly smaller round top and a bit broader circular base, water trickling in the form of droplets from the rocky surface above striking the top of the lingum, as if, Ganga coming down the Siva's head to quench the thirst of pilgrims. Projection of stoney rock behind exactly looked like a thousand headed Cobra. The assumed sculpture appeared the handi-work of a master artist. The figures that time had developed on rocks over centuries probably due to weathering resembled the characters portrayed in the great epics, surely a life time experience for the pilgrims to witness. Krishna says that upon touching the top of the lingum, he had the feeling of water oozing out of a depression exactly at the centre of lingum head, but no one took him serious, because they had seen water drops falling from above.

Though, an extremely difficult ascent over treacherous rocks, with an inclination of 90 degrees at places, like one at Yammeh-haer, just before reaching the cave top. Yammeh haer is a huge vertical stoney slab extending to an area of nearly hundred sq. mts well embedded

in the part of the mountain with crevices hardly enough to hold the foot. Visibly no other alternative route to reach the cave, it definitely poses challenge even to an expert mountaineers, moreso, in absence of hiking equipment. The ascent becomes more risky because of the threat of a gunnah, a dreadful creature of the family of snakes, mostly found hiding in the wild growth of grassy bushes on barren mountainous surface with no sign of a tree visible as far as eye could behold. However, it was a less price for joy that pilgrims experience on reaching Haershour cave. Back journey was not so tiring, though perilous, of-course, at Yammh Haer. Krishna says that one who has not ascended Haershour, Danaeshour, Maha-dev and other such places can hardly know the real enjoyment that the sport of hiking provides.

KUBER ASTHAPAN AT LADHU:- Krishna and his party had reached Zeawan by 7.A.M., where people had gathered in large numbers, for taking holy bath in the spring and subsequently offering puja to Lord Siva. Yatries coming from far off places were assembling at the place to take part in an annual religious congregation. Having missed visit to the temple of Lord Kuber on earlier occasion, Krishna was eager to proceed towards the temple situated in close vicinity. However, the pilgrims preferred morning sandhya at Zeawan spring in the first instance; which was followed immediately thereafter by a brief visit to the temple of Lord Kuber, Lateron the pilgrims except Krishna and his associates joined the expedition to the holy cave of Lord Haershour in the forenoon. The groups that had returned from Haershour had developed such an intimacy with Krishna that they decided to visit Jawala Mata at Khrew. One of the acquaintances turned out to be the resident of the village, he invited the group members for a light break fast at his residence, which they readily accepted and appreciated his hospitality.

LODUV TEMPLES AND SPRINGS OF JAWALA MATA TEMPLE KHREW:-The village boy, who invited the party to breakfast, agreed to accompany them to the temple of Jawala Mata.They took a route via Loduv, a place in a close proximity of Pandrethan. Here the road branched off leading to two important villages, Wuyan and Khrewv; both the places are blessed with springs. The village called Loduv has two temples, the larger one mounted on a shallow water tank, which receives water from a spring with oozing point in the north-east corner. This temple differs from every

other temple of Kashmir both in appearance and architect. In some respects it can be compared to shankracharya temple, of-course, top of temple resembling that of temples at Wangath. The second temple, a smaller one, is externally replica of the larger temple.

The party chose the shortest route to reach village Khrew at the earliest. A beautiful spring on the road side, the place could have been of a great tourist attraction, but callous approach and religious bias exhibited by certain elements, have not only resulted in creating a conflict between the two communities concerned over the claim to the possession of the site, but also hurt the feelings of those whose ancestors worshipped the spring as a shrine dedicated to Jawala Mata. Previously, a huge temple structure stood built at the site, which helped to preserve the sanctity of this wonderful specimen of water body that quenched the thirst of locals when the tap water system was not available.Unfortunate part of the story is that the structure was destroyed and even the Siva Lingum and other idols like Breshub installed at the mouth of the spring and within the rectangular tank were also not spared from desecration. Even the ruins of ancient temple have been defaced and the site had become the bone of contention. Within the shaded space at the originating point of the spring, the only object of worship left now, is a trident carved on a stone wall.The party took a dip in the holy spring. Immediately afterwards, they set out for the temple shrine of Mata Jawala on the top of the hill, experts say it contains a dormant volcano. During ascending the hill, the pilgrims did have a feeling of breathless and got exhausted. Therefore, avoided stairs/steps as an alternative ascent. They preferred a curved path to reach the temple. On reaching the gates of the temple, they first offered puja at Lord Ganesh's sheilla, some steps ahead they had the Darshanas of Jawala Mata's Sheilla. They were told by the pujari that the sheilla stood without a ground support and to justify his words, he inserted a long stick from below and to the amazement of all the stick could be moved freely between the lower surface of the Shilla and the floor on which the Sheilla was supposed to rest. They were also told that Mata was in the form of a frozen flame and in the event of Sheilla taking a slight slide/ slip from the spot the entire place could come under jawalla, molten magma. Offering prayers for sometime, the boys descended the stairs and were soon sighted talking to the villagers, who told them that there was another spring within the locality, the

waters of which they saw flowing through the narrow drains. From here they decided to to visit Bala Devi Mandir. They boarded the bus for Balhama. They spent some memoriable moments there. The place was quit enchanting.

BALA DEVI SHRINE: - Shrine is dedicated to Bala Devi. The site housed an ancient temple dedicated to Bala Devi, the structure of which might have been raised to ground by fanatic elements during foreign rule, later on the people had repaired and reshaped it to give it a look of temple that it bears today. Four fully grown Brangh trees are fused together by nature, a wonderful display, (A tree species called Brangh in Kashmiri), some stony slabs depicting different deities, of course, images carved on them, stood lined up inside the temple premises with Sindoor applied on them as well as on the part of shoots of the fused trees held by the ground in the centre of the open temple. A vast piece of land surrounding the temple, bearing fully grown pine and conifer trees, compelled the visitors to extend their stay for a while. In-fact the party had not the mind to leave without spending atleast an hour in the beautiful environment. They had prayers in silence and lateron played games with conifer cones, some of which they took along for decorating their drawing rooms. The village boy had to return to his village for attending the prayers at the temple. Thus the group bade fare-well to him. Krishna and the rest preferred to foot the distance up to Pampur.

PADMASWAMI-VISHNU TEMPLE:- Pampur town came into prominence in the beginning of the ninth century A.D, because of a man called Padma, whose father was a humble wine manufacturer. He exploited the influence of his sister as the concubine of King Lalitaditya and mother of minor Jayapida and thus rose to the position of a very powerful minister. He was responsible for constructing a temple of Padmaswami-Vishnu at Pampur town, the place with ancient name as Padmapura.The temple ruins can still be seen near Ziarat of Shah Hamdan (A Mosque at Pampur). Here, the party was led in to a house of one Saffron merchant, a distant relative of Krishna's cousin. The host felt happy to welcome the guests on the auspicious day. He made all arrangements for the feast and the party's comfortable night stay. Next morning, the group took the early opportunity of catching the bus to Awantipur, a distance that takes hardly fifteen to twenty minutes from Padmapura.

AVANTIPURA RUINS (AVANTISVARA TEMPLE & AVANTISWAMI-TEMPLE):- Avantipura derives its name from King Avantivarman, who ruled over the vale between 855A.D to 883 A.D and blessed the town with two jewels in the form of two magnificent temple structures. The larger of the two temple structures called Siva-Avantisvara temple, is situated in a village called Jaubror, hardly three-fourth of a kilometer from the main town. The temple is in dismal ruins. However, it gives an idea of great grandeur and superb piece of artistic beauty even after being ruthlessly demolished by a Muslim King, Sikander-buth-Shikan. The artistic excellence can be appreciated only after visiting the place in person. Every broken piece of stone lying on the ground is a priceless gem, a treasure. It can lead one in to splendid past of this vale of beauty. It is beyond doubt the perfect depiction of power of human hand and mind, which provides pure eternal feel. The temple is situated in a courtyard enclosed by a big stone wall. The gateway is in the middle of the wall and is divided in to two chambers by a cross wall. The shrine in the centre of the courtyard stands on a square shaped base, which has a stair on all the four sides, similar to that of temple at Pandrethan. The sanctum is in ruins, which makes it difficult to create the picture of what it would have been before its destruction at the hands of insane elements. There are two subsidiary shrines at the two rare corners.

(Note:-The readers who are interested to know the minutest technical descriptions on various temples and religious sites mentioned in this book, may refer to a Book entitled "Ancient monuments of Kashmir" by Late Sh. R. C. Kak for detailed description).

Another temple dedicated to Lord Vishnu, known as Avantiswami-Vishnu Temple, located in the same town on national highway, nearly a quarter of a km away. It is much more complicated in structure and probably in a better condition. Avantivarman is said to have constructed it in his youth, before ascending the throne. The ruins of the temple have been unearthed after removal of lot of silt and debris, which had accumulated to so much of height that the entire structure, except upper part of the walls of the gateway, was hidden from the sight. The entrance through the middle of west wall appears to divide it in to two chambers that could be approached by flight of steps. The front plasters of the side walls carry carved figures



Ruins of Magnificent Temples at Avantipura







of lord Vishnu and his consort. The entrance wall is decorated by sculptured reliefs. The right and the left hand walls of the outer chamber represent Godess Ganga and Godess Yamuna, recognized by their respective vehicles crocodile and tortoise. There is a lot for the observer to look at and explore, but the purpose here is slightly different in the sense that it reminders the need for preservation of ruins left. Back to the description of the temple, the central shrine is in a state of complete ruins and gives the exact idea of the loss that the temple first suffered at the hands of Bhasa, commander of King Jayasimha's forces and again, in fourteenth century by the mad acts of Sikandar-But-Shiken followed by Araki. Numerous pieces of stones speak of the artistic brilliance of those times. Technical details have already been written down by great researchers and scholars including R. C. Kak which leaves little scope for any further elaboration. Here the purpose is to minimize details without missing the content.

MALANGPURA STUPA RUINS:- A village, some four and a half kilometers from Avantipura and almost at an equal distance from Payar, known as Malangpura was the next destination of the party. The village houses the ruins of mediaeval stupa, with only its base in position; (A similar square structures were in vogue those days in other parts of valley). It represents the artistic brilliance depicting the Buddhist philosophy through the sculpture of furious monster running after a man, who is shown as flying hastily in desperation followed by a vigoruos struggle and lastly the act of overpowering of the prey by the monster, visibly engraved on the edges of stair walls, only partly preserved, because of sheer ignorance. It is really a place worth visiting. It may be added here that the ruins despite all odds have retained artistic beauty and are the prized possessions.

PAYAR VISHNU/SIVA TEMPLE:- Retrieving without visiting the Village Payar about four or five kilometers from Malangpura would have been a great folly. Fortunately, the party did leave for the village where they felt quite thrilled at the sight of the best preserved mediaeval Kashmiri shrine with the sanctum open on all sides that could be reached by a single flight of steps on the east side. The temple has internal base approximately 2.25x2.25 square metres, while the height is almost 6 metres. The temple is said to have been built by Narendraditya between A.D. 483 and 490

supposedly dedicated to Lord Vishnu, but to some, it is probably the depiction of eleventh century Siva temple as per the style and structure. There has been an attempt to dismantle the temple as is evident from the out of position of stone roof top. The temple leaves a wonderful impression of the then state of art and craft, especially, after sighting the bull capitals, crosslegged siva and a long elephant trunk, six armed dancing Siva, musicians playing on veena, three headed Siva seated cross legged and so on. Limitation of technical knowledge hampers the description. The party left for yet another village nearly thirteen kilometers from Avantipur.

VIJAYESA TEMPLE RUINS: - Vijbror or Bijbehara, an ancient Town on Srinagar-Jammu National high way, is situated on the left banks of river Vitasta. It is only a few kilometers away from Anantnag. Raja Vijaya Anand had been responsible for establishing this township in the periphery of magnificiant temple of Vijayeshwara. North of it is a village of Semthan (udder), which was formerly known as Chakradhara or Chackdar (Ancient names). There are also two Shakti-Sethals of Goddess Jaya Devi and Goddess Vijaya Devi on the western side of the town. Bijbehara is one of the most important ancient tirth Sethals of Kashmir. As per a legend, when Shakti emanating from Lord Shiva tore apart the mountain at Khaadenyar, in Baramulla (Varmul: Boar Shaped/ Viraha Autar's place or face) draining out the waters of Sati Sara so that Jaldobhave could be captured and lateron killed. Shiva used Chakra, a weapon to kill him and during action the speedy chakra turned into a huge ball of fire due to friction and a portion of it fell at a place and thus the place assumed the name Chakradhara. In due course of time, a temple Chakradhara was raised by the then ruler with assistance of local people. The place is presently known as Chakdar in Bijbehara. It had magnificent temples of Chakradhara and vijayeshwara built with tall spires/ dooms that could be seen from far off places. Bijbehara is also known for places like Hari Ghat Waghama, Semthan and Jablipora etc, where statues of various Gods and Goddesses have either been found or excavated, which give an idea of the acts of insane people, like Shams-ud-din Araki, who brought about large scale destruction in the valley times without number.The town of Bijbehara is also famous for Kah-Kah Pal temple with huge Shivling installed in the sanctum santoria and a medium size round stone in the backyard towards the river bank. The stone was kept for display of visitors, who in a group of eleven with a touch of little finger tips

could raise the stone from the ground. In the neighbourhood of it is what is known as Pathchhi Bagh, laid down by Moghul Governor. It has dozens of chinar trees that give wonderful look to the place. In fact, it is a lovely picnic spot, where tourists on their way to Phalgam spend atleast an hour or so to relax. Vijbror is also known for being the place where Lallishori, the mystic poetess of Kashmir spent most of her life. There is a house in the town; where an axe, called Shankren Makhchhe has been kept for public display. People visit the town mainly for seeing Vijayesa and chakradhara temple/ruin sites. It is said that the worshipping the deity inside the splendid temple structure of Vijayeshwara situated in the middle of the town, would never go waste. The height of temple dome, they say, would form its shadows streching for miles. Skinder ButhShikan who had been incited by Suha Bhatta, the neophite besides destroying several hundred temples, had the magnificient temples in the town razed to ground.

THE NARASTAN TEMPLE: - A village named Narastan, nearly 9 kilometres from Arpal has an ancient temple, which is still in fairly good shape except for the distinct features of its roof, partially in disarray. The temple cell faces south and contains Sivalinga. Unlike other temples this one does not possess a ceiling. The walls rise perpendicularly until the level of the roof space wherefrom these appear entirely different. There is a small shrine like the one at Pandrethan on the north side of it. In the middle of south wall just opposite to the sanctum, is a gate way. The temple structure is made up of building material containing greyish limestone with lime plater.

KAPAAL MOCHAN: - People have been visiting the village called Dehgam or Dehgoom from very early times. A shrine associated with Lord Shiva, usually, referred to as Kapaal Mochan, with Rambh Aarh flowing in its immediate neighbourhood, did compel Krishna and party to move towards the village. This village lies at the foothills of the Peer-Panchaal range; a part of the district Shopian in South of Kashmir. The party arrived at the destination, a mile to the west of the main town of Shopian, to be exact on the left bank of Rambh-Aarh, (A tributary that joins Vitasta–Nadhi). Devotees say that Kapaal Mochan is a place where Lord Shiva secured deliverance from (Kapaal), one of the Skulls of Brahma, while Digoom a corrupt word derived from Devigram, the spot where Kapaal had disappeared. The place finds its mention in Rajtarangini, as an important Devsthal,

which is substantiated by the fact that some old ruin structures have been found lying around the holy shrine. There is a (Nag)/ spring in the centre of the temple premises. A beautiful Shiva-Lingum seated on an elevated platform was installed; just on the west side of the spring, with a roofless structure around it. It presented a divinely set up which the pilgrims rarely had the fortune to enjoy elsewhere. Locals believe that there had been a definite reason for the structure to be roofless. On many occasions during winters, one could see the Kapaaleshwara Lingum, receiving the silvery snow flax that poured directly through the opening that the roofless structure provided for snow to pour in, often forming a white turban around the lingum top and a white ring on the base (Pranail), a unique sight to witness. Otherwise also, the place had a special significance on account of a convention of performing Shradha ceremony particularly for dead children /neonates or deceased relations or unattended people (bachelors /maids), who would die before they could bloom, so to say, are plucked in the prime of their life, even before having gone through the purification ceremony and for whom usual religious rites were either not prescribed or could not be performed, anywhere except at Kapaal Mochan as per the scriptures. (Children dying before attaining age of five or prior to performance of thread ceremony or unmarried girls or dead relations, the performance of normal religious rites/ Shradha in such cases was not permissible. It was performed in Dehgoom only, which is still in vogue amongst locals as well as Non-local Hindus). Hindus believe that Shradha ceremony performed on 12th day of Shuklapaksha/ 2nd fortnight of the month of Shravana at Dehgoom liberates the soul of the painful life of a preet, (supposedly a spirit). A scripture called Kapaal Mochan Mahatamya, give a detailed description on the origin and the essence of this pilgrimage.

The scripture tells us that once Karma Vishnu and Karma Brahma acting deities in trinity of Hindu representation of God (Brahma, the creator, Vishnu the preserver and Maheshwara, the destroyer) felt jealous of the greatness of Lord Shiva, who could immediately feel what was going within their minds and thus to dispel their illusion, he formed a Linga which was without a beginning or an end. It was limitless in diameter. The Lord asked both Brahma and Vishnu to fathom its two ends, while former set out in search of the upper end, the later tried to seek the lower one. Both of them tried very hard, but were unable to find the respective ends. After great deal of labour, Lord Vishnu returned dejectedly, pleading before

the Lord of Lords, Bhagwan Shiva that he had failed in his task of finding the bottom end of Jyotir Lingum. But, Brahma did the opposite, instead of admitting his failure; he preferred to tell a lie by quoting that he had found the upper end of the idol, a sin which Lord was not ready to pardon. He lost his temper. Lord Brahma in order to convince Lord Shiva produced cow and Ketki, as two witnesses. While Ketki supported Brahma's claim, cow though nodded her head in affirmation yet moved her tail to refute the Brahma's claim. Lord Shiva cursed both cow and Ketki for giving false evidence. Ever since cow's tail and not the head is worshipped, while Ketki flower is no longer used in the performance of any act of worshipping. Now, as regards punishment for telling a lie, Brahma's fifth head was cut off by the Lord. He would have used it as a pot. But then, He realized that he had committed sacrilege, murder of a Brahmin, (Brahmhatya) and as such he was required to perform penance to ward off the sin. He visited many holy places of pilgrimages, but the skull did not fall off his hand. The sacrilege followed him in the guise of an ogress (Rakshas). At the end of twelve years period, he reached Varanasi where he somehow got rid of the sacrilege, but not before bathing at Manikarm. While riding his bull, the skull dropped off his hands. Lord Shiva immediately left for Himalayas, travelling far and wide; He reached the place called Shopian, the sacrileged skull that had dropped off his hands at Varanasi re-appeared. He wondered how it had happened; He spurred his bull to run fast, the bull in turn followed strictly his master's mood (instructions) and ran at a lightning speed. As the bull was trying to attain the fullest pace, one of its hoofs stuck into a rock. It tried to pull the hoof out, the moment it did so, its other hoof penetrated deep in to the earth. The struggle by the bull to free the hoofs lasted till the land beneath the rock turned in to a spring. Meantime, to honour Lord Shiva, the Sun appeared there and the sacrilege was forced to disappear, skull bone fell off the hands of Shiva and he thus got deliverance from Kapaal and in turn the place got the name Diggoam. Lord Shiva granted a boon to the place that those who die at an early age or die an unnatural death can have redemption from sins provided their kith and kin perform the rites prescribed in the scripture at this place. Thus, Kapaal Mochan became a pilgrimage, while the scripture containing the conversation between Bhairava and Bhairvi, thus, recorded, served as the guide for the performance of the prescribed Shradha ceremony at Kapaal Mochan in respect of those, who are supposed

to continue to pass through infinite number of life forms, by way of repeated births and deaths (viz; cycle of life and death from the lowest species to higher genus). The tirtha provides a way to achieve salvation/ liberation from such an unending cycle of re-births, provided the kith and kin followed the path prescribed in the scriptures. The procedure as per Mahatmya, are laid down in Garuda Purana as well. The pilgrims, who visit this place, have to take sacred bath in the Kund, which is followed by shradha ceremony of the deceased and idolizing of a male or a female child of the village whose appearance would apparantly resemble to that of the deceased. Prior to migration of Kashmiri Pandits, these children would be clothed and offered ornaments. They were also fed with choicest food items including kheer, besides paying Dakshina/ money, after tarpan and pind-daan was over. (Pind- daan is performed for union of the particular soul with the souls of respective ancestors, which involves mixing rice balls and splashing of water. The Pindas represent souls here). All this time the Brahmin (Purohit) would recite verses from sacred scriptures and thus Kapaleshwara lingum puja would be performed with great devotion. There would be an automatic feel amongst devotees, who would recall memories associated with their parted ones. Feeding and clothing the strangers, taking them as their missing ones would give greatest satisfaction to the devotees. Why this place also became victim to the acts of terrorism? May puzzles a man of reason. They burnt Dharmshallas, raised the temple structure to ground, but the most unpardonable act, the terrorists committed, was the sacrilege of the lingum and the spring. Lord Shiva's Lingum was broken in to pieces.

The entire property of the shrine was looted and land encroached thereafter.The calm and cool atmosphere around the shrine, especially, the background decked with majestic chinars, coupled with scenic beauty of the forests and continuous murmuring of Raambh Aarah and Laar Koal flowing nearby, would definitely give a feel of an unforgettable experience during pre-migration days, a memory so deeply seated in devotee's mind that it does obviously disappoint the person, once he finds everything destroyed in the name of Jihad. One can only expect that good sense prevails upon the religious Zeallots and the people concerned understand the desirability of restoring the peaceful atmosphere of the by gone days. Hopefully this sacred place dedicated to Mritunjaya Mahadeva, would

one day infuse faith in people so that there is no to intolerance and militancy proves a temporary and short lived phase. It is very important for people to have their minds re-united and face the insane elements for ensuring the restoration of the rights of those who had been forced to leave their native land, just because they could not subscribe to their belief or thinking that encourage waging of jihad, the holy war, not within, but outside..

Next destination was Khanabaran, the abode of Mata Tripura Sundari, situated at Devsar in Kulgam (Manzgam).

KHANHBARANN & OTHER TEMPLES IN KULGAM:- The name, Khanhbarann, is a combination of two words, Khanh and Baran, Khanh standing for surang or more appropriately crevice or pass and Baran the gate leading to sacred shrine between the mountain peaks named Sundarnaar. As per legand, very few people have gone into the interiors of the crevice (Naar) and those who dared to go inside, have experienced strange sounds, with no visible sign of any living being, forcing their retreat and those who tried to walk further, either lost their mental balance, or failed to track their path and never turned back. Devi Tripura Sundari is worshipped here as Mata Shama/ Ragneem in quite a similar fashion as at Tulamulla, Logripora or Tikker and accordingly Zesth Ashtami is also celebrated here as her birth day. It is said that Mata Tripura Sundari on Lion's back travelled to Kashpmar via Sunder Naar.

KULGAM A TEMPLE DEDICATED TO GODDESS KULVESHWARI:- The temple was desecrated like various other temples in the valley during turmoil of 1989-90. The temple has been reconstructed by the residents with the support of the migrant residing presently at Jammu. Annual yaga is being organized by the members.

VILLAGE CALLED VANPOH:- The place is associated with Krishn Joo Razdan, a renowned saint and a poet of incredible poetic genius. Late Maharaja Pratap Singh, the Dogra King, was great admirer of this mystic poet. The poet's simple, sweat and concisely composed theosophical poems/ leelas, especially, one beginning with "Chukh cheeh Mokshe-Datta paan cheey, Kawal sattukh vachar dehem, yeeh maah gacheeh aasun teeh myah demh, yoguk teeh gyanuk saar deemh, Mamtahi Lankah zaltam bawvock Bebeeshan paltam,...Sodhma chus mangan bekhah servehai mah yoguk thh

Gyanokh saar dhem, yeeh maah gyachh ...." is so soothing a prayer that it takes one straight to the realms of almighty. Kashmiri pandits are fond of all his devotional songs/ Leelas. They also like leelas written by Pt. Govind joo Koul, Parmanand, Master Zindh Koul and other mystic saints, recorded in melodious voices of most renowned Kashmiri singers of the day, like Vijay Malla, Kailash Mehra, Naina Sapru, Nirja Pandit, Rajinder Kachroo and Kiran Koul. Kashmiri pandits feel proud of being part of the valley, where they enjoyed listening to Naatishreifs sung by Dolwall Sahib, Sofee Sahib, Shamima Dev, Sheikh G. N and last but not the least Late Tibatbakal Sahib, who will always be remembered for his Shiv leelas," Bel taah Madhv whenh golab pampoosh dasthay" and "Ali Mardan Khan's compiled Shiv leela,"written in Persian and Kashmiri Sofeyana moseky played by him along with musicians. (Absence of adequate in-puts have restrained the mention of number of shrines, temples and religious and historical places, God willing, these places shall find mention in next edition.)

ANANTNAG AND THE IMPORTANT RELIGIOUS PLACES IN ITS PERIPHERY: - Leaving Onepoh and moving towards the main town of Anantnag in south Kashmir, the name itself is a complete introduction of the place. Literally, Anantnag means numberless springs or for that matter of fact, Nagas. Some say that a pious King named Ananta once ruled over this township. He was kind and generous and as he was responsible for over all development of the town. Accordingly, after his death the township came to be known as Anantnag. But that is most improbable as he reigned as late as 1028-1030 A.D. While it is most probable that it was king Nag Jaati, who ruled the place and thus the place acquired the name as such. But then some people hold that it is a place associated with Ananta, the Lord Ganesha with holy spring as his abode, who served as the Rakshak ensuring security of the entry point to Shiv Loka, with Amar Gufa, where Lord Siva and his consort Parvati must have decided to reside. Neelmthpurana is full of the descriptions of this abode of lord. In-fact, one can find references to almost all important Tirthsthals in District Anantnag. These places are not only of great religious and social significance, but also carry importance for people belonging to Snatan-Dharma. Pilgrims from different parts of the country would visit various places here every year. Some would come for having Darshanas of Lord Amar Nath ji and some for the

performance of Pind-daan at Martand and Kapaal Mochan in Anantnag and Shopian districts respectively, especially, during Pitrapaksha of Malmas-Banmas (An additional month in Hindu calander year accruing after every two and a half year period.). Other important religious places, where the visitors usually thronged, are Sheeshnag/ Sheeshremnag, Tarasar and Marasar, Oomu Shiva Temple on the foot hills of Banihal of Peerpanchal ranges near Verinag, the origin of Vitasta Nadi, (Shivlinga at both the places invite the attention of devotees, seeking moksha), Nagdandi in close proximity of famous Achabal-Nag. The district boasts of world famous places like Phalgam, springs like Koker-Nag, Achabal-Nag, Verinag, Martand or Mattan-Nag, Gottam-Nag, Nagbal and Devibal in Anantnag, main town and then Konwsar-Nag. All these places in different parts of the district Anantnag are provided with enormous wealth of scenic beauty. Kulgam, presently a separate district, has a place Devsar Manjgam, famous for sacred shrine of Khanabarani, the abode of Mata Tripura Sundari, one of the Devisethals of Ragna Bhagwati and then Uma Devi in Uma-Nagri. All these religious places associated with Bhavani are undoubtly the places of great attraction so for as different types of tourists are concerned. There are various Muslim shrines in the district. Reshmaulh sabhun is one of them. (The vale of Kashmir had been divided into only two regions till recent times , one named as Kamraz, the then District Baramulla, which included the areas beyond Shalteng extending up to Shardha and other as Maraz, district Anantnag including Srinagar). The greatest Kashmiri folk tales, including Heemal and Nagraie, if not, Aknandun and Tabardaar, have probably their plots and the story line originating from the sacred town of Nagas. Whether, the place is associated with Nagas, the snakes, or the Nagas, the springs or the Naga, the community of ab-origines (Nag, Peeshash and Kouls Jaaties, the aborigines of the valley), is a matter of great debate, but it is certain that the tales like Heemal Nagraie etc., must have been enacted on this very piece of land. Inquisitive readers may find the brief summary of such tales interesting as these provide an insight into social web of the ancient past. These tales would make every one feel proud of the rich cultural heritage. Aknandun, for instance, is a tale of childless couple, who despite all the comforts at their disposal had little interest left in their life. Having tried all the medicinal treatments, practized all religious procedures and even fed and clothed the poor and the needy, all their efforts at conceiving

a child seemed to go waste. The curse of not having a child, however, did not deter the couple from being sober and generous. It was said of them that who-so-ever knocked at their door, would never go empty handed. They kept their faith alive against all odds.Till, one day, a Yogi happened to pass by their house he knocked at their door, calling Alakh-Niranjan, one of the names of Lord Shiva. Both the husband and the wife descended the stairs to greet the Sadhu. The couple while offering alms to the Yogi seemed to wear gloomy looks. This made the Yogi to ask the reason behind their withered faces. The lady replied that though the couple loved each other immensely and had every thing they could aspire for. With enough and to spare, they had no specific reason to be dis-satisfied, yet they felt something missing in their life. Yogi wanted to know as to why they felt so worried for what was yet to happen. The lady immediately burst into tears. She sobbed and could hardly express her mind, while the husband pleaded that all the comforts and wealth meant nothing to the couple without having some one to look after them in their old age. Yogi was an elated soul. He knew that the couple had no flaw in their character, except that they were too innocent to cut the web of maya (Maya-Jaal). He was ready to offer them a boon, which could help the lady to bear an offspring of-course a male one, provided she was ready to make a promise that after the child attained the age of twelve, she would return the child to him. The lady readily agreed to the condition laid down by the Yogi without considering the consequences. The yogi thought for a while and departed from the scene in quite earnestness. Meantime, a handsome baby was born that brought incredible joy in the two barren lives. The boy grew up in a decent atmosphere. Before he could attain the age of twelve, the couple decided to perform his thread ceremony. (Thread ceremony is held for initiating the process of imparting education both in religious scriptures and routine curriculum).Perhaps, the lady had no idea of the promise that she had made to the Yogi. Meantime, Aknandun as a dutiful son was always at the beck and call of his parents. He did all that could boost their morale. Once, thread cermoney was over, and the boy attained the age of twelve, a party was arranged. But before the celebrations could take place, there was a call of Alakh Niranjan at the gates. Yes, the Yogi had arrived for taking away the child. For the family members, friends and relatives, it was bolt from blue. The entire atmosphere was filled with remorse. Parting away with the lovely child was quite agonizing. But parents knew that

there was no alternative other than handing over the child to the Yogi as per the condition laid down earlier. Thus, the parents prepared themselves for the inevitable and ensured fulfilling the promise made twelve years before. Yogi issued instructions for slaughtering of the boy so that he could have the body served in the feast that night. Despite the state of shock the dejected parents must have been in, they did what yogi told them to do. Once the feast was ready to be served, Yogi uttered some mantra and to the utter surprise of all, the boy came out of the degchi alive and ran towards his parents, who hugged him with their eyes filled with tears. In this hour of Jubilation, yogi had left the place without any one noticing his disappearance. Thus, this story concludes on a happy note.

As regards the tale of Heemaal and Nagraie, Krishna chose to narrate this beautiful classic love story, starting with a simple character of Sadanad, a very hard working gentleman, whose wife, often seemed to oppose all that he did. Her demands would never end. Every night when Sadanad returned home after day's hard labour, his wife would rebuke him on one pretext or the other. Probably, the creator of the story is depicting the character of a childless mother who always finds fault with her husband, not because she hates him, but for the apathy or lack of interest in her barren life, an absence of comfort of a neonate lying in her lap. Tired of routine verbal battle, Sadanand would often think of either killing himself or his wife. One day, while on his way back from work place, he came across a snake, though very small in size yet seemingly full of venom, repeatedly drawing its head in and out of a hole in the sand dune. Sadanand decided to catch it. He pushed the sand particulates sideways with a thin stick, clearing passage for the snake to come out of the hole. He even inserted the end of the stick into the hole leaving snake no chance but to sneak out into the opening of the bag that Sadanada had kept in position for the catch. The moment he saw the snake entering into the bag, he tied it with a knot and left that spot with the bag. On reaching home, he had to encounter the long list of quarries from his wife as usual. Sadanad let the bag to be inspected by her. Once she opened the knot of the bag in eagerness, a snake was seen coming out of it. Before she could raise hue and cry, the little creature turned in to a small handsome boy of such an innocent look that the lady for a moment forgot everything and started hugging the child as if it were her own son. Her face bloomed with joy when the boy assured the lady that henceforth she could treat

him as her son. They decided to keep this secret away from others, till the time things became normal. The woman did all to avoid interaction with people. As time passed, the boy grew up in the atmosphere of love and affection. Soon he came to be acknowledged as the most handsome person around. He became known for his qualities of compassion and valour. In-fact, all the inherent traits in the nature of his species were absent in him. He seemed to be blessed with all that any one of royal lineage should possess. Beautiful lasses were ever willing to offer him their heart, but Nagraie showed little interest, till an unusual thing happened. Though, Sadanand and his wife had started looking out for a suitable match for him, yet they were not sure whether it was a right step in view of his background. Somehow matrimonial proposals came for him from suitable quarters. The old couple asked Nagraie to be ready for a date with a girl at some distant place. He was initially hesitant, but had to undertake the journey at the insistence of foster parents. During this trip, he had to pass through a jungle. He wanted to cover the forest track as quickly as possible so that he could reach his destination before dusk, which seemed an uphill task. But as he had covered in half way distance earlier than expected; he stopped for awhile to relax his muscles. Suddenly his eyes caught the sight of horses, tethered round small poles struck deep in to the ground at selected spots, which surely seemed to be a part of some royal estate. While he was surveying the site, a group of gentlemen with stout bodies seemed to approach towards him. Nagraie felt apprehensive lest they charge at him. For a while, he felt that he had nothing except the strength of his arms to defend himself. But once they came near, it was absolutely clear that they had no such intentions. In-fact, they welcomed him with friendly gestures. He thought for a moment and then concluded that he had drawn their attention, because of his tres-passing the path. A mistake, deliberate or otherwise, was a mistake, he decided that he would express his regrets, if asked for. However, it took him by surprise, when men in arms escorted him up to the entry of the canopy, which lay at the far end of the plot, a slightly sloppy piece of land. He was greeted at the entrance by none other than the royal princess herself, who neither wasted time in seeking formal introduction nor waited for the response or reaction, instead asked her guest to meet her in private. Nagraie had so far not met any person, who could talk to him without reservations. The princess behaved as if Nagraie was already known to her. He felt a

sudden urge of peeping at the face of this gracious host, whose voice was as soothing as the effects of Veena, (A principal string instrument used in musical concerts in southern parts of India). And the moment he took the initiative, he almost fainted, on catching the glimpse of a dashing fairy face full of brilliance, with her body parts so perfectly carved and designed that one could not help but praise Almighty God for his flawlessly creation, an unmatched beauty, engraved in leisure. Never before had Nagraie experienced such an over-powering beauty in opposite sex. He stood mute waiting to be instructed by the captivating and compelling beauty. He made desperate attempts at extending the duration of meeting with the lass, craving to listen to her sweet words continuously, appearingly as melodious as the sound of cuckoo in early morning hours. By now, it had become amply clear to Nagraie that the beautiful lass in canopy, was none other than Rajkumari Heemaal, the only daughter of the King of the state. Though, reluctant in reciprocating the favourable moves of the princess, Nagraie could hardly resist the temptation of indulging in the game of love. Under the spell of charm and beauty, he forgot his approach to ethics. Lest, it may hamper his relationship, he preferred to keep his real identity a secret for the time being. His intentions were not bad, but revealing the truth in haste meant taking genuine risk of losing the lovely relationship, he really aspired for. Meantime, the canopy meet changed into an intimate relationship, which in due course of time turned into a proposal for matrimonial ties. But all this time, Nagraie had the feeling of guilt. He could neither speak the truth plainly nor hide it from the person he was going to have union with. Somehow, he mustered the courage, but before he could reveal the secret, princess was asked to present herself for the prayers. Still Nagraie succeeded in conveying her, his pre-condition regarding the matrimonial agreement in brevity' a binding upon the princess, not to insist Nagriae at any point of time on taking hot milk in a pan.

Soon the two loving souls were tied in nuptial knot. They would have lived a blissful life had it not been for the kin's of Nagraie, who had been following him like a shadow. In-fact, they had deputed agents to find his whereabouts right from the day; he had disappeared from the Kingdom of Nagas. Royal guards had taken a vow that they would not return their place till they succeeded in pursuing their prince to return. Their efforts yielded results, when one day they got

the news of his presence in Heemaal's palace. They set themselves for the task of getting his latent personality revealed. They tried their best to make Nagraie concede the truth about the back ground; he belonged to, but failed utterly. In the end, they engaged Nagins/ women for roping their prince back, who followed him wherever he went, trying all sorts of tricks. Finally, they resorted to the practice of sowing the seeds of suspicion in Heemaal's mind, a weakness that all men and women fall prey to. They succeeded in convincing Queen Heemaal to test Nagraie by offering him boiled milk for proving that he represented her species. Queen had been trapped in the game of suspicion. Nagraie feeling extremely upset, requested his wife not to lend her ears to deceitful words of his enemies. But vamps had prepared the woman in her not to roll back, especially, when the needle of suspicion tilted towards her husband. Adamant in having her doubts cleared, every time she met him, she repeated the same thing. Nagraie kept his cool and showed no inclination in accepting the challenge his wife posed by constant instigations. He tactfully avoided direct replies to her quarries. Nagraie even warned Heemaal not to insist on something, the out-come of which, she hardly could bear. He knew that it would mean inviting hell of miseries. But then, her demand persisted and obviously the disaster was inevitable.

Nagraie requested in desperation that Heemaal should try to see through enemy's trick and not get swayed away by the reasoning put forth by the enemy. He advised her to retreat and laid stress that in case she let the bird go out of her hands, she might try ever so hard lateron, she would have no chance to recapture it and life would never be the same thereafter. As luck would have it, time played its role and Nagraie had to yield before the obstinate and uncompromising approach of his beloved wife. Before going in for the grievous act, he once again pleaded before her to change her mind. Unfortunately, it was destined to happen, Nagraie drank the milk, he was nowhere to be seen. He had disappeared altogether, leaving his wife Heemaal all wailing. She repeatedly kept on saying that she had brought the misfortunate upon herself despite being warned by her husband. She went from pillar to post, but could not succeed in locating the place, her husband had gone in to hiding. He had been snatched away by the spell of enemy agents. Years of separation passed on, but, without any clue. However, Heemaal did not lose her heart, she continued her efforts and ultimately succeeded

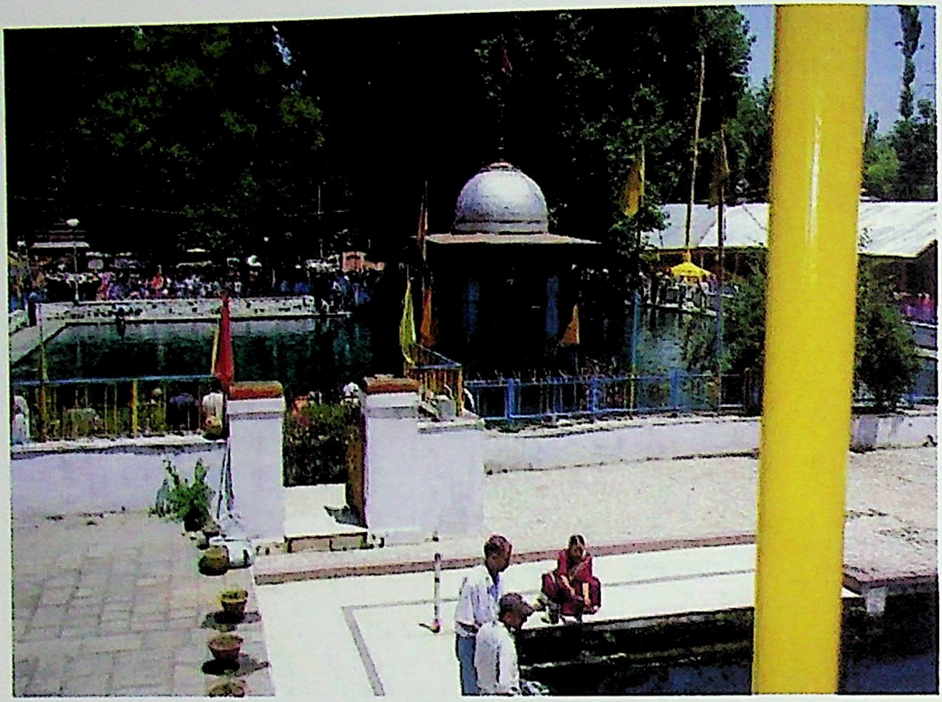
in tracing her husband, but it was not the end of her miseries. Someone led her into the palace of the Naga king, where she was to face the most insulting treatment at the hands of the courtiers, who prevented her from meeting the king. She did get the glimpse of his face from the far end of the hall. She saw him seated on the throne, with the bodyguards all around. Meanwhile, the guards handed her over to ladies with directions to extract as much labour from her as her body would permit. One time queen now worked as a maid. But then she had no regrets playing her new role, at-least, it offered her the long awaited opportunity of seeing her husband, who had no free existence, bound by the conventions that every the king is supposed to. Days passed, the lady folk continued to maltreat Heemaal. While, Nagraie had no power to provide any relief or assistance to his wife, he would often whisper in desperation that it had been her own doing. With each passing day, life for Heemaal was becoming unbearable and full of woes and the ladies of the palace manipulated things not only to tease her, but to force her to embrace death. But she was made of a different stuff; she bore this treatment with patience and did not complain of it to any one. In the end characters that were responsible for the separation of the couple somehow became one of the unifying forces. Thus, story concludes in a comical end. Party decided to continue their journey to parts of the town not visited so far.

NAGBALH-ANANTNAG/ GANDKHNAG:- Nag-balh is an exceedingly beautiful square-shaped large spring, brimming with fresh water of dark green shade, oozing mostly from a cave like structure at the foothills of Sarnal hill, resembling Ananta in appearance. The spring is teemed with silvery coloured trout fish. Pilgrims throw feed to these pious souls. A small spring on left side of it, contains dissolved sulphur. A bath in it, is said to cure various skin diseases. Both these springs have great religious sanctity. A Shiv-ling stands installed at the centre of the bigger spring with its lower half dipping in water and the upper half usually decked with flowers. During Amarnath Yatra, the shrine is thronged with pilgrims. Devotees perform Aarti at dawn and dusk.The smaller spring dedicated to Goddess Durga, has a temple with a beautiful image of the Goddess in its sanctum-sanctoria. There are number of inns for the stay of Sadhus and pilgrims.

DEVI-BAL:- A small spring in the neighbourhood of Nagbal, dedicated to Ragnya Bhagwati, is situated in a market place adjacent to Reshmalh Sabunn Asthan. Visit to this Shrine bestows peace of mind.

RESHMOALH SABUNN ASTHAN: -Baba Hardwali Rishi/ Baba Khaki, son of a Blacksmith (Khar in Kashmiri) was born on 22nd Rubul Awal 812 hejri, at a village Labruna, in Anantnag. He was a born saint, a pure vegetarian and a practical man, who had control over his nerves. While offering prayers, he used to work in fields and would help his family out of troubles. Once Reshmoal's spiritual teacher Sultan Sabhi Darsgah visited his house, while he was away from his house. Guru and his men were served a decent feast. When the Peer/ teacher was asked to leave some food out of his plate for Reshmoalh Sabh, he refused saying that he was a saint and should not taste non-veg foods and added that he himself was only twelve trakhs, while Reshmoalh was Khar (Kharvar normally sixteen trakhs, a reference to Baba's spiritual superiority over his Peer). As a tribute to this saint, people of Anantnag do not take meat preparations during his Urs days or what people called as Reshmoalh sabhin dohh/days.

MARTAND: - The party next visited Martand / Mattan, about two and a half kms from Anantnag town and 61 kms from capital city of Srinagar. The shrine is situated on main Anantnag- Pahalgam road. Martand, the Hindu Thirth, occupies a very special place amongst Hindu Mythological Dhams. As per a legend Kashyap Rishi was married to two girls, Ditti and Aditti. While former bore one male child Danvas, the later had thirteen sons and of those thirteen, first one became the ruler of Surya Lokah. It is also said that Aditti was pious and spiritually inclined. She spent most of her time in religious ceremonies and prayers. It was probably because of her devotion to God that Lord Vishnu blessed her with first twelve sons. However, when she was to deliver the thirteenth child, she did not stop fasting, a ritual much to the displeasure of her husband. This led to the premature birth of the thirteenth son, Mirtenda. The child resembled the Pinda or oval shaped creature, which glowed like the Sun. Aditti dropped this panda shaped son into Satisar, which by then had been reduced to number of smaller water bodies in southern part and one of them was Martand.



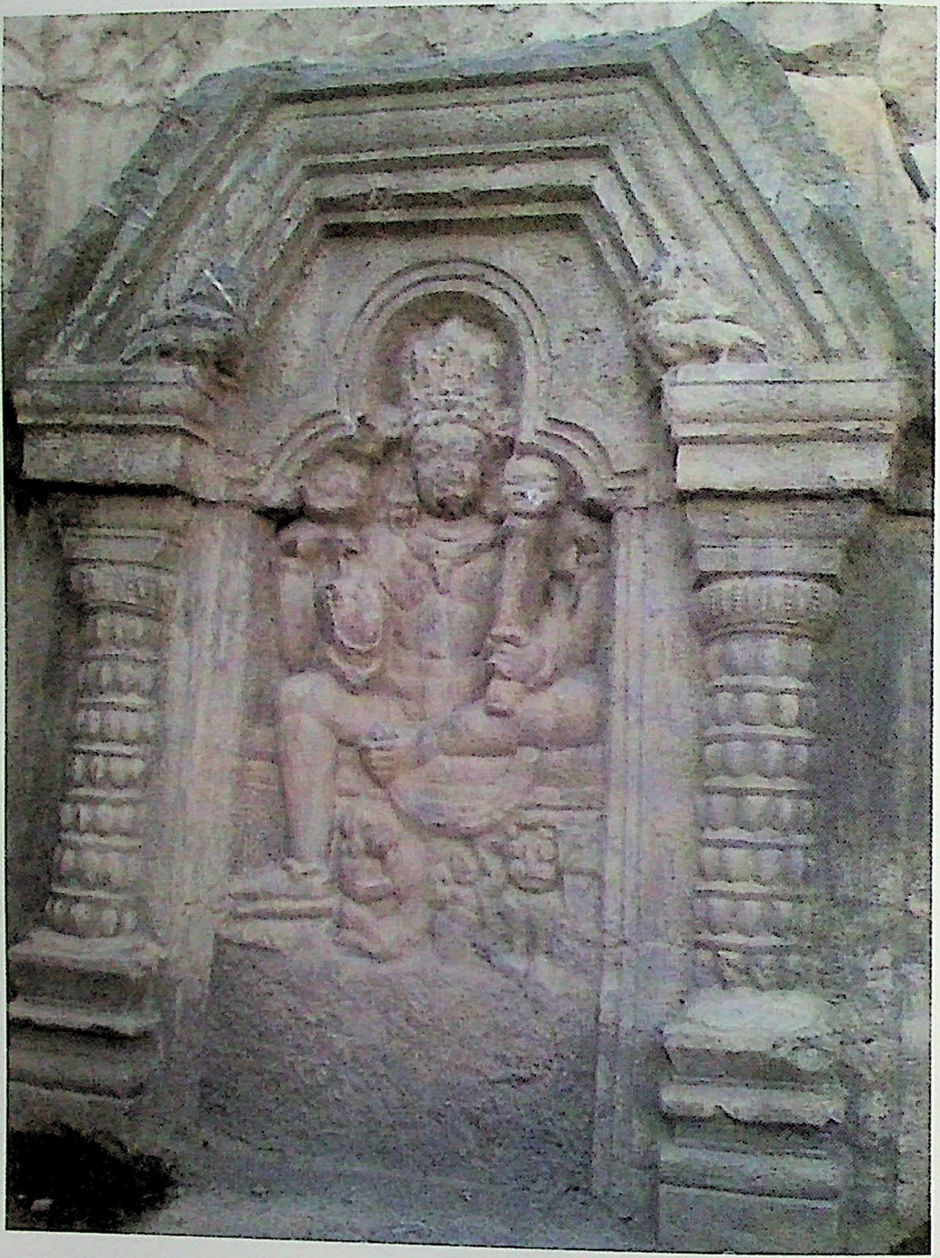
Springs at Martand in Anantnag

She reported the incident to Lord Vishu, who searched for the lifeless Pinda and upon finding it in the depths of satisar, he with his chakra cut it into two halves. The upper side became the Bimal Kund and lower side the Kamal-Kund. People also believe that Maa Bharg Shikho came out of the Kund and seated herself at the top of Martand. She took the form of three Shakti Swaroopni jyoti, known to worshippers as Beema, Baswati and Shree Bhawani. The stream that flows out of the Bimal and Kamal Kunda was named Chaka Nadi. The springs Bimal and Kamal have been blessed with fish and those who offer pinda dhaana to the fish after Shradha ceremony on the day especially in Adhik mass of accumulated days in every two and a half years, pave way for their fore-fathers to attain salvation.These Shradhas are preferred particularly on Sundays or Vijay Saptami or, Amawasi or on lunar or solar eclipse days. Martand pilgrimage is also an important stop-over for two days halt of Charri-Mubarak on way to the holy cave of Amar Nath Ji. It may be mentioned here that during pitrapaksha, shradha ceremony is also performed at the confluence of the waters of Lamboderi (Lider Nala) originating from Shesh-Nag and Chaka-Nadi from Martand springs.



Ruins os Surya Temple at Martand

SUN TEMPLE OF MARTAND:- Raja Ramdev of Pandava dynasty worshipped Sun God. Thus, a beautiful temple dedicated to Surya Devata came in to existence on the top of the plateau at his instance. At the base of this plateau lay green paddy fields stretched over a vast piece of land, irrigated by a network of springs, canals and riverlets with clusters of villages spotted here and there, identifiable by closely planted trees and guarded by lofty snow clad mountains in the background Before Skinder-Buth-Shikan destroyed and turned it into ruins, Martand Sun temple, in its original form must have been most magnificent and unparallel piece of architectural beauty in valley. Like most of the mediaeval temples of Kashmir it had a courtyard with the principal shrine in the middle and series of externally made plain columns around, except on left side, which originally had columns resembling that of Avantipur temples. The gateway stands in the middle west side of the four sided structure and has the same width as that of the temple itself. The lay out of the structure is as per set rules of Hindu architectural grandeur. Among the images carved on the walls of the structure are those of river-goddess Ganga upon her vehicle crocodile, river–Goddess Yamuna with her vehicle, the tortoise, Gandharvas in flight with umbrella over them.



Part of ruins temple

Again the statue of Lord Vishnu, like the Vishnu image found in Avantisvami temple with left face that of a boar (Varah) and the right one that of a lion-headed Narasimha both compared statues are eight armed, with lower hands placed on the heads of chauri-beares. The statue wears the garland/ vanamala, while Prithivi, the Goddess Earth, shown bursting between its feet. Probably the

description of this statue may not match the form and state, described as on date. Emblems may perhaps not be identifiable presently, because of the total neglect and lack of care for preservation of monomemtal ruins. However, under description, Vishnu Idol also finds its replica installed within Gaddadhar ji Mandir on the river banks at Amira-Kadal. Again, fourteen seated figures engraved on the walls of antechamber and statues elsewhere within the premises, have expectedly suffered the same fate. Even the most unimaginative person on seeing this structure in ruins, would be deeply heart. However, structures in ruins have proved a big boon for the economic prosperity of local people, There are numerous details which have deliberately been avoided for it goes beyond the scope of this text and further the readers may find it difficult to visualize the description in words. But then the temple ruins of Martand on the top of the plateau are there for all of us to feel the pain at the plight of our monumental treasures. At the same time, it also explains the unpredictable and unethical nature of men in power, who hardly think of the harm their thoughtless acts cause to the future generations.



Side view of Surya Temple

Back to famous springs of Martand and the ancient Durga Mata-temple, the temples of Radha-Krishan, Sita- Ram-Lakshman &, Hanuman, Lord Ganesha and last but not the least the recently constructed Surya temple within premises, depicting Sun God in twelve forms viz: Data, Arima, Mitra, Varuna, Indra, Vivaswan, Pusha, Parjney, Anushman, Bugtrusht and Vishnu, all laying by the side of sacred ponds/ Springs of Vimala and Kamala Kunds teaming with fish. The birth anniversary of Sun God is also celebrated here every year on Magh Shukla Paksh Saptmi The place has a great significance for Hindus, especially, for performing Pinda Shradha of departed souls during Malmas-Banamas.

SHILLA OF BHARGSHIKHA:- In-fact, it was during the visit to Bumzoo that gave the party the occasion to have Darshans of neighbouring Devasthan of Goddess Bhargshikha at Devi-bal (viz; Bheema, Baswati and shree Bhawani).

LOKBHAWAN ASTHAPAN:- Duru-Verinag in Southern part of Anantnag District, is at a distance of eight kilometers from the main town. To be exact, it is situated on the right side of a famous village called Larkipora, a road along the foot of a hill leads one to the beautiful Lokbhawan, the famous Hindu Devi-Sthal with a most sparkling spring lying within the shrine premises, popularly known as the abode/ peeth of Goddess Sadh Laxmi. At the top of the Hill is an abode of Mahakal-Bharva. Towards north of holy spring is Naran-Nag (Not the Naran-nag of Wanghat/ Gangbal). There is also a beautiful temple within the Spring.

BUMAZUV CAVE: - After visiting Lokbhawan and surveying ruins at the site where once stood Sun Temple of an unmatched artistic beauty, Krishna moved towards a little village called Bumazuv, a place associated with an important group of artificial caves, carved out of large mass of limestone cliffs. In the village, at the foot of the cave were two temples, which stand converted in to Muslim ziarats. These temple structures have been reshaped in to Shrines by giving them a covering of building material probably for concealing the original artistic and architectural features. While the larger temple is known as Ziyarat of Baba Bamdin Sahib, a disciple of Sheikh Nur-ud-din Noorani, Nund Rrush, the ruins of smaller temple can be seen on the west side, the description of which stands adequately covered by Late R.C. Kak in his book. Now researchers have identified larger temple with Bhimakesava shrine built by

Bhima shahi of Gandhara, maternal grand father of Queen Didda, wife of Kshemagupta, Didda virtually ruled Kashmir in two spells between 950-958 and 980-1003.

VISIT TO VERINAG, ACHHABAL AND KOKERNAG: - The party had been feeling exhausted. Members expressed their desire to have halt or else move to a place where they could relax for sometime and simultaneously enjoy and feel the rudiments of nature's beauty without someone to disturb or add superlatives. Of-course, at this point of time, the thought went immediately to visiting the places like Verinag, Achhabal and Kokernag. These places are undoubtly mind refreshing, best suited for a change that the party deserved after a long and tiring journey.

The spring at Achhabal, in the words of Abul Fazl, contains nector in the form of blue water, the drinking of which ensures sick to recover their health. Mughal Kings were so fascinated that they laid beautiful gardens to honour the nature, while Maharaja Ranbir Singh contributed by extending the area of its gardens further. Jahangeer was in love with Kashmir in general, while Achhabal he liked in particular. He had willed that once he would be on the death bed, he be brought to this place so that he could breathe his last in the peaceful atmosphere of this exceedingly beautiful spot. The hammam that he had constructed for himself and his queen Noor-Jahan is still in preservation and reminds of his lifestyle and the extent to which he must have enjoyed moments of his life in Kashmir, something which can make people of today feel envious of.

VERINAG SPRING:- Description shall be taken up separately in next chapter of this book. However, as regards the source of river Vitasta it is said to originate from the spring known by the name of Nila-naga, after the snake diety of the same name. The spring has a great importance as one of the Hindu pilgrim centres, besides being a prominent place on the tourist map of India, one of the most frequently visited places in Kashmir, where thousands of tourists from all over the world pour in.

KOKERNAG:- This Spring is equally enchanting. Magic about the place is that it has an ideal location, for romance, a spot that compels lovers to be lost in the beautiful environs without fear of being disturbed. It is believed that lord Krishna had a brief halt here during one of his visits to Kashmir and thus the place is blessed

with beauty akin to his colour. People say that the water in the spring represents the black colour as a depiction of the colour of the Lord, called Shaamrang. It is a pious place that has tasted the touch of his feet. Nature has definitely decorated this place with specified colours which gives it a distinctive constitutional look. One can see the water oozing out of the spring hidden in shrubs, having a slightly blackish colour, reasonably because of the types of rocks or the black soil forming bottom of spring surface or the reflection in the water due to the full grown trees on the slopes of the Pirpanchaal, the foot hills that make the place a lover's den. Even today when modernity has crept in all walks of life and tresspassing the domains of Nature is no exception; the place seems still un-invaded. No wonder then that Krishna and his party felt their physical and mental fatigue gone altogether. They felt refreshed and ready for the continuance of remaing part of the journey.

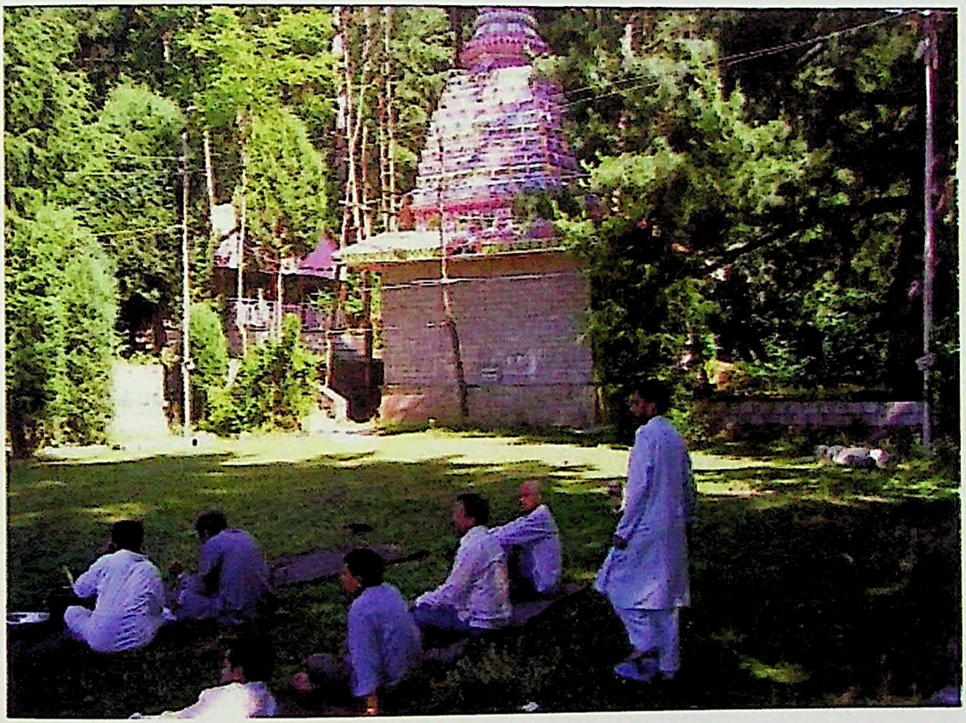
KOTHER SIVA SHRINE/TEMPLES: - Another famous Village, named Kother, is situated about three kilometers from Achhabal. The village derives its name from Kapatesvara, a short form of Papasudana-kapatesvara, one of the names of lord Siva, to whom the spring at the spot is dedicated to. King Bhoja of Malva, contemporary of King Ananta (A.D. 1028-1030) of Kashmir had round tank constructed here for which he sent gold to the king. He had vowed that he would always wash his face with waters of this thirtha and Padmaraja by dispatching the large number of glass jars full of the spring water made it possible for Raja Bhoja to have his vow fulfilled. The stone basin built by Bhoja is partially existent. The temple structures resemble temples elsewhere in the valley. The roof of one of the structures seems to have been destroyed in some fire accident. It is also said that it was king Mutskund, who laid the foundation of the temples of Kother. He had by birth ears resembling that of a buffalo and he wanted to get rid of the unusual shape of his ears. He tried all available means at his disposal, but without any success. At last somebody advised him to try a bath in the waters of the spring at Kother, which he did and achieved his heart's desire. This made him to spend his treasure upon the foundation and upkeep of the temple. (There is every possibility that by the time this text is out, some of the sites visited and referred to, might not present the described view. There are people who are bent upon wiping out all that bears any link with the ancient past. They hardly hesitate in disowning their past and obviously rule out the possibility of allowing

the existence of even a trace of any culture and religion other than the one post-established by them after their conversion to the new religion. The hard core element straight way throw themselves behind those who commit unpardonable acts against humanity. They take pride in favouring those responsible for destroying the world heritages like the one, at Torra- Borra in Afghanistan, where the tallest Statue of Lord Buddha engraved in rock was desecrated, disfigured and broken to pieces with mortar gun fires). Therefore, people amongst saner and rational lot, of whom there is no dearth, should stand up and tell these men that history like nature does not change by simply rubbing and removing all that facilitates reading the past. In-fact, truth has to come out some day. Let it be clear to those who believe in enforcing their views, ideologies or their life style on others, that they may succeed for a while, but in the long run such an approach and attitude breeds in contempt and in turn leads to the weakening of the social fabrics which more often result in infightings, destablization and ultimately to the destruction of the entire society. The acts of removing or defacing old ruins sites, at numberless places, recently at Srinagar and its areas of Soura, Hariparvat, Hawal or elsewhere should in no case be encouraged. Those who profess cult of violence or act themselves as terror machines, with the sole aim of annihilating all that signals to past, which they consider does not belong to them, should be socially discarded. Such type of people may suppress others by explioting power, pelf or number strength of their religion, they may propogate and practise the doctrine of hatred and may disturb peace and tranquility on trivial issues, but then they are doomed to perish, for at the end of the day they get caught in their own mesh.Therefore, these elements should not only be exposed but be wiped out all at once, even if it means inviting temporary criticism. It is good to eliminate a few rowdies, who otherwise become a constant threat to the very survival of the entire society. Before the exodus of 1989-90, various shrines would rarely be visited by the devotees for obvious reasons of avoiding the uncalled for reactions from opposite quarters, which was perhaps, an escapist's route and not the right course to adopt. The status of such sites in the prevailing unfavourable and hostile conditions is obvious and can very well be visualized. In this behalf, the secular credentials of ruling class are not so good, especially, so far as preservation and maintenance part of ancient temples and monumental sites is concerned. Their approach is highly pathetic and deplorable. It would

have been appreciating, if the state had discharged its duty to the expectation of all, especially, when it came to the safety of citizens, safeguard of their properties, their religious places and restoration of important sites. There may be a reason for maintaining criminal silence on the illegal activities of those, who have no respect or love for culture and traditions. Probably, they suffer from fear psychosis. They apprehend that the moment they say something against the undesirable elements, it may prove counter productive and may even jeopardize their power matrix. Of-cource, vested elements are always ready to flare up and expiolt such issues. Thus, the weaker section is left to believe "What cannot be cured must be endured" Krishna and his party is ready to go ahead with the planned journey.

NAGDANDI ASHRAM:- Concluding phase of their journey should include places like Nagdandi, in the vicinity of Achaabal, which is truly a paradise to witness. A level ground on the foothills, houses a pond and a temple, surrounded by pine forests except on the entry side. It is presently under the management of Vivekananda ashram trust, who looks after the place.The ashram has been maintained even in post-displacement period.The environment is so good that it is sure to invite the tourist influx in near future, provided political weather is harmonious. The place is best suited to people, who like to meditate in solitude. The group spent hours enjoying beauty of nature. Swami ji, in-charge of the trust is an energetic, secular in out look and enjoys quite a good rapport and influence in higher circles of state Government. The trust has developed the infra-structure of the ashram. This ashram provides free board and lodge for the visitors.The financial assistance comes from Beluer Math. Some vested elements amongst local people from different faith have started wielding such an influence and command over Swamiji, that besides leaving every thing to their charge, he is ready to let the shrine renamed inaccordance with their faith and terminology for obvious reasons. Swami ji may perhaps be thinking of gifting the shrine in return of the services they rendered him during his illness and most crucial peak militancy period in 1990, when he could not move out of the place. He survived from a so called terminating disease in early years of first decade of 2000 and the people served him, of-course, not free of cost, as there was no dearth of funds. But then, he is nobody to take decisions for the sake of gaining good will. It is a Hindu Asthapana, which was managed by group of people, who besides maintaining the Shiv temple were also involved in

various social activities. Lateron, devotees of Vivekananda formed a Kendra of activities that promoted Vivekananda's teachings. A saint of highest order from Bengal came here. He was from Muth. He would always be engaged in prayers infront of a burning dhooni/ fire. Devotees in large number visited him for his blessings He was a man of knowledge and piety. He managed ashram and built a temple. After his death, trust replaced him by Sanyasis from time to time. Prior to migration present Swami ji took over the charge. He shifted Shivlinga on to a corner and built another temple on South Indian pattern.



Nagdandi Temple at Achaabal

The Nagdandi is nobody's personal property, besides being an ashram dedicated Swami Vivekananda, it is also an ancient Hindu Thirtha, the remains of which have been cordoned in a small space in a corner of the ashram ground. Nevertheless, community recognizes the services of managing the Asthapana and also for organizing an occasional Langer facility at Tullamula, actually funded by Rama Krishna Ashram.From here Krishna and his group decided to leave for Pahalgam, where some of them intended to join yatra to the holy cave of Amar Nathji (For Siva Shringar Rus Darshana). But before joining the yatra, a visit to a temple at Mamal/ Mamalaka is

felt desirable. It is a small but very significant temple structure from archaeological point of view.

MAMALVESHWAR TEMPLE: - The temple is situated on the right bank of Lidar, those who have seen ruins of temples at Martand and Awantipur should visit Mamal atleast for understanding meaningful similarities. The structure suggests that it is a monument that has the history of interaction extending beyond the period of the first arrival of Muslim horde. Those who repeatedly lay stress on the possibility of the initial commencement of Amareshwar yatra just dating back to some 150 to 200 years, their hypothesis can outrightly be rejected after taking in to account the existence of yet another temple structure recently discovered, on old Amarnath ji route by none other than the Government led explorers, headed by one I.A.S officer Mr. Parvez Dewan. Furthermore, there are references available, in various religious book, historical documents and sacred scriptures; which amply prove that yatra to holy cave has been continuing since time immorials. One can find mention in this behalf in books like Rajtarangni written by Kalhna or travelogs of Western travellers, like that of Vincent A.Smith and G.T.Vigne, who have given detailed account of Amarnath yatra. All authentic sources make it clear that the yatra to holy cave has a long history of more than five thousand years. Those who propound the theory that pilgrimage to holy cave started only, in recent times, they should know that this yatra not only finds reference in Nilamath Purana, but is also described in Bhrigu Samhita and Amarnath Mahatmaya, the two ancient texts composed probably before Nilmata purana. Mughal Governor Yusuf Khan has also given complete details of this pilgrimage in response to the information sought by the Mughal king Akbar the great.Thus, hearsay/ the false propaganda of those who link the pilgrimage of Amarnath Ji Shrine to the period when Adam Mallik reported about the presence of cave with Siva's Icelingum on the mountain, some one hundred and fifty years ago needs a counter. Bakerwalls (Shepherds) usually move to higher reaches of the mountains for providing better fodder to their live stock, especially, during summer months and they do come down to valleys as soon as the winter sets in. These people generally come across wonderful happenings at times, which are usually, beyond human comprehension. It is possible that a simple shepherd called, Mr. Adam Malik from Batkote Phalgham, during one of his ascents to holy cave of Amarnath might have encountered something unusual and

accordingly enthused at the beauty of Siva Lingum in the cave and milky water flowing from the peak in the form of Amar-Ganga or else he might have had the occasion of having darshans of Amareshwar and Uma Devi by accident, which he confided to his Hindu friend, a learned Brahmin from Mattan village, who most probably had never undertaken the banned and virtually abandoned pilgrimage in view of the then prevalent political conditions. Now, this Brahmin being encouraged at what the shepherd had told him, wanted to explore the early possibility of the commencement of yatra. Fortunately, the two had a chanced meeting with a Sadhu from Srinagar Akharas; the three together approached Maharaja Gulab Singh and narrated what the shepherd had seen and experienced during his ascent to Amareshwer hills. However, this incident can in no way be associated either with the start of yatra or the discovery of yatra route. What shepherd had reported, was a mere endorsement of sanctity of the place? The group had conveyed their resolute of re-starting the pilgrimage once again and subsequently pleaded before the king for granting his assent for reorganizing the pilgrimage, suspended/ banned during Pathan rule or even earlier. From here onwards, the state provided all possible support for smooth conduct of the pilgrimage. There is also an old legend, not at all linked with Mr. Malik that a long time ago some innocent Hindu shepherd had to keep one of his cows out of the folk under surveillance, as this particular cow would disappear during day time and the moment it was dusk, the animal would return to her herd almost un-observed. As days passed, shepherd grew more and more eager in finding out the truth behind this mystery. He tethered this particular cow so that its movements could be restricted; yet he failed to keep the track. One day he decided, that come what may, he would follow the cow. He tied one end of the rope with the tail of the cow and other with his body and sat against a rock to have a nap. After some time, he felt a pull, which awakened him as if from a deep slumber. With out caring for anything, he followed the path offered by the pull of the cow's tail. The ascent continued till the cow stopped at one particular spot of heavenly beauty. A couple in rags appeared on the scene. The male had a skull in his hand, he started milking the cow. Later on the collected milk in the skull was offered by the couple to the shepherd, who refused to drink the polluted milk. However, the male member applied a drop of milk out of the container on the forehead of the shepherd, who could do nothing except gazing in surprise. In

the meantime, the couple disappeared unceremoniously and the cow resumed her back journey, forcing the shepherd to follow. On the foothills, shepherd confronted a hermit, to whom he narrated the whole episode. The hermit stood up, licked his forehead and vanished from the site. Next morning out of the curiosity, shepherd once again set out for the place and this time not after cow but in search of the couple in rags, though he failed to trace them anywhere in that area, yet he surprisingly found himself in the cave with Ice-lingam standing straight in front of him. He felt an irresistible sleep and had a nap during which he perhaps realized the truth. He wanted to share this reality with his fellow beings, but there were only a few takers to his story.

Now, back to Maharaja Gulab Singh, who re-set the path that had been badly hit during foreign yoke and formalized all the Padaavs en-route henceforth and subsequently bestowed upon Mallik Gujjars, Akhada Sadhus, Martand Brahmins and Dharmarth trust, the right to share the offerings, with entire management entrusted to Dharmarth Trust. (Padaav is a resting place for travellers, who move in caravans). The yatra calendar was set as per the earlier convention, viz; between fifth day of Ashaad Shuklapaksha and Shrawan poornimashi, of-course, organizers could also have Darshans on Ashaad poornimashi. Maharaja effected an improvisation on deranged yatra system and ensured the safety of yatris, which he thought was a primary duty of the state. Barracks were erected at various Padavaas en-route the holy cave, particularly at Phalgham, Chandan-Wari, Pissu-Top, Zoji-Bal, Naga-Koti, Shesh-Nag, Waw-bal/Jan, Maha-Gunas/Ganesh, Poshpathri, Panjtarni and Amaravati, besides Saraes/ Rest houses built at all padavaas between Srinagar and Martand. The building material consisted of Surkhi (Powdered mixture of baked clay and lime), wood and stone, which was carried to Paadavaa sites on mules. Thus, the journey became some what smooth and better organized. Legend goes that prior to this Sanayas /hermits in saffron robes, would seek salvation here by ending their life after Siva Darshana. They used to jump from mountain cliffs, the practice that was banned by Maharaja they say. Such changes and phases must have been the part of history. However, Maharaja's period received extra publicity because of the fact that Adam Malik, a man from a different faith had acknowledged the essence behind visiting the holy Cave. Yatra continued hereafter, despite occasional

interruptions due to rough weather conditions. But it had never been as turbulent as in recent times. Earlier, nature looked harsh and dominating, but presently the militants are proving to be mightier. They do set terms and determine the course that state has to take and even the smooth conduct of yatra lies in their hands. There have been number of incidents involving bomb blasts that not only took the toll of precious lives, but also created trust deficit. However, it hardly dampens the spirit of true worshippers. At one time, when militants challenged the might of the state by issuing threats that they would in no case allow the yatra to continue, the passive administration was hesitant to take effective steps. The so called secular Govt. expressed its apprehensions on the safe and smooth conduct of yatra in light of an open call by militant organizations. The way state Govt. had shown its inability, the holy yatra would no longer have been in operation, atleast till the return of normalcy. But for brave jawans of Armed forces, who despite all odds, did not allow the enemies of peace to execute their roguish designs. Of-course, things have not improved to the satisfaction of pilgrims, despite the sacrifices of our jawans, mostly because of the dirty politicians and dirty politics played during Amar-Nath Ji yatra row in 2008 thereafter. Unfortunate part of it was that even Ex- as well as sitting Chief Ministers were not willing to take a back seat. One of them took a completely biased stand. He openly declared that he would not compromise on the subject of parting with even an inch of land for facilitating better and smooth conduct of Amar-Nath yatra, not even on temporary bases. The statements issued by so called mainstream leaders, with a secular tag attached to their families, were so unexpected that they unashamedly seemed to side with extremists and thus, made it clear that they represented only the majority community and not the entire state they claim to be stake holders of. This included the youngest Chief Minister, who was aspiring for a second term. He spoke as if the land in question was to be allotted out of his or her inherent property. He/she perhaps forgot that he/or she as C.M, was above power politics. Another towering personality, a leading national level politician and one time union minister and also Ex-C.M. of state, with his vociferous offspring and party members, whose role in encouraging the militant element in the valley is no secret, would keep shouting all the time on so called anti-muslim policies of the then weak and meek centre and tried all the tricks to out-smart every other opponent in championing the so-

called Kashmiri Muslim cause. The strangest thing about these politicians is that they do swear regarding their loyalty to Indian constitution during formation of Government, while rarely hesitate in taking anti-Indian stunts, like pleading for autonomy of the state or fighting for Muslim cause alone, surprisingly, once they are out of power. Opportunism is in their blood, which never allows them to stick to one thought. They switch over their loyalty to any party in power just to serve their own ends. Most of the state politicians have been practicing this craft since 1947. One of the tallest politicians had very early felt the pulse of this kind of politics; he got a great boost, when he was given a Ministerial berth in central cabinet. However, he created a history, when he orchestrated a drama to promote the cause and gave publicity to ongoing Jihad and thus lent direct support to militans. He is said to have played another important role, while re-shaping Indian politics, he brought a division amongst Indian people on the bases of castes and tribes, which he very well knew, was a way to weaken the majority community in the country and surely a way to grab the power with help of so called discriminated sections of the society, a bigger game plan, the consequences of which were beyond the understanding of the then P.M and his immature band of politicians. Their hunger for power had made them politically blind and insane. The influence of Kashmiri wazwan had sealed their mouth. Thus, the tenure of our so-called secular leader as minister of cabinet rank created ripples that were hard to contain or tame. The seeds of caste based politics sown by him have not only changed the course of Indian politics but has also given birth to so many dangerous trends that created a society with corruption infested politics and thus the very survival of the entire Indian Nation has been put at stake. The role of such political leaders in local politics is in no way less deplorable. They are eager to rehabilitate those who acted against the state and the country and who continue to indulge in anti-state and anti social activities. Infact, these so-called leaders rely on their support and do not hesitate in associating themselves with agenda of establishing a theocratic state. They take pride in such petty things as renaming of historical places. During chief Minister-ship of one such enthusiast, the breath taking beauty of Baalgoam / Pohulgam or today's pahalgam was caged in steel meshed boxes or cells. Palatial buildings and posh hotels constructed during post-1990 era in the surroundings areas of these sliced land pieces, [illegible] then the imposition of heavy entry fee on

visitors to these barricaded land masses made a mess of once a splendid piece of beauty that nature had gifted Kashmir with. They are least bothered about consequences of taming nature in such an irresponsible manner. These people have a reason in doing all this, because they just want to prevent a particular section of the society from enjoying this gift of nature during yatra time. They want to convey to them that Kashmir in general and South Kashmir in particular is the inherent property of these politicians and their band of followers alone. They do claim that they love Pahalgam and can not allow it to be polluted by pilgrims. What about Lidder Kolh/ Aadoo Nalla their favourite fishing place, does it need no such protection? The visitors otherwise also are left with no choice but to enjoy nature only on the banks of Lidder Kolh and Aadoo-Nalla. Therefore the shift of picnic spots from earlier vast stretches of plushy green land to the banks of riverlet has indeed lessened the burden of the Municipal committees as entire garbage now finds its path into the stream. People who feel comfortable on banks with fishing stick in one hand and a whisky bottle in the other, ultimately end up with their empty bottles finding repose in the gushing waters, it hardly matters to them that such an act is not healthy for the water body to survive. They may be right in holding the view that the influx of yatris /tourists to holy cave create nuisance, but then, same yard stick ought to be applied to places visited by tourists elsewhere in the valley, like for example Gul-marg and Sona-marg, or even various places in Jammu region. Perhaps tourist rush has no such role to play at places other than Phalagam. The yatris may be unwanted guests, whose contribution to economy according to them is quite negligible and that their arrival simply causes pollution, but then why did the people of this area welcomed these tourists with open arms, provided them Kahawa chaie and turmeric rice on roads voluntarily, on the resumption of yatra first time after turmoil of 1990? Was it simply a drama, a display of pseudo-secularist character after being responsible for killing thousands of Kashmiri Hindus and driving lakhs of them away from their homes? Surely, these biased people welcome the yatra where it benefits them; they are against it when their purpose is served. If yatra to holy cave of Amar-Nathji was a real cause of concern for the environmentalists, remedial measure ought to have been taken as per the procedures followed during various other big religious congregations elsewhere within or outside the country. But these people lack sincerity. The display of

double standards, opportunism and exploitation is their way of life. Those, who have had the chance of undertaking pilgrimage to the cave both prior and after the migration, carry a general view that gives a clear indication that the state Government is not sincere in providing even the basic facilities to pilgrims, whose arrival boasts the state economy in one way or the other. One feels sad at the shallow line of thinking of the people at the helm of affairs, for even if, one considers that the yatra/pilgrims are of no consequence to development of the economy, is it not the duty of secular state to provide facilities for smooth conduct of yatra in general? Why the yatris have to board down the buses and walk miles before reaching Phalgam, the spot where Lord Shiva had left Breshab? Why the movements of yatris have been confined to roads only? Why are their movements being restricted in Phalgam town, while other tourists roam freely? Traditional Padaav of Phalgam is so important part of yatra that there ought to have been no such restriction imposed. Immediately after their arrival, they are directed to start their yatra straight to Chandanwari, which for ordinary pilgrims with bag and baggage is quite tiring. In-fact, they get exhausted well before the difficult phase of their climb starts. These yatries have to board down their buses at Noonkun Bus stop, a considerable distance from Phalgam, wherefrom they are told that for security reasons they should foot the distance up to Chandan–Wari the same day, compelling them either to hire a potter or a mule at exorbitant rates or else carry the load themselves. Prior to1990's, it used to be a totally different story. Yatris would relax for the night and could taste choicest food in langars. People reaching early would be having the liberty of occupying Dharmshallas / Sarais/ Barracks and even those who arrived late had no problem camping in the open. But now the yatris have no such choice. Why the host Govt. does not want any voluntary organization to come to the help of these yatris? The answer to this question is simple and obvious as it all goes against the economic interests of local people, who would otherwise make maximum benefit out of the visits of these pilgrims to holy cave. The people as well as the state are not ready to acknowledge the fact that their welfare lies on the arrival of maximum number of yatris. The undeclared policy of discrimination is so confusing for outsiders to understand, but pilgrims belonging to valley know the disease these biased people suffer from. These biased people do not believe in discussions, they only know to slaughter reason and use sword and

the gun to silence their opponent, a characteristics that hardly reqires any proof. Some of them throw absurd argument, which gives the impression that it is nothing but just a delibrate attempt to dampen the spirit of yatris so that Amarnath yatra and other such congregations that remind re-emergence of the culture, they had succeeded in wiping out in 1989, is made impossible to continue in future. Otherwise, what prompts them to hold back the permission to voluntary organization or impose a sort of Jazia tax or tease them to the extent that they desist from providing free langar facilities to yatris? In the past there would be no dearth of free and choicest food. Yatris had nothing to worry on this count all along the route to holy cave. But now with state indulgence, yatris have to suffer for lack of proper food, shelter and essential commodities, even when one is ready to pay for these items at higher prices. People do remember the services rendered by various N.G.Os during earlier times, included one by Late Gulshan Kumar. The perusal of tariff notifications issued from time to time not only show pure lack of rationale. Believe it or not a poneywalla is ready to provide the services of a pony at one fifth of the government approved rates, not because the potters and ponywallas are poor and can accept lesser fare in bargain, but that they themselves feel ashamed of asking for what they think is not justified. Who can comment on such state of affairs or policy matters? Further lack of proper medical care or other requisite facilities make the pilgrimage extremely risky. Dearth of hutments is another handicap; while this may not be the case with pilgrims of other communities from Kashmir, who are usually provided with all the facilities needed whenever and wherever they desire undertaking the religious tours within or outside state or country. Obviously, the difficulties that yatris face during their on-ward journey to holy cave, is an experience that they can hardly describe in words. It is not that they are expecting arrangement of five start hotel at such high altitudes, but then the journey can actually be made less risky. Those who might have been part of this yatra some thirty year back; they would certainly feel the difference. World might have progressed a lot, but for yatris in this part of the country, the process of development has reversed. Facts and figures are there to speak. The intention here is neither to criticize the state or people of any particular community nor to give this human problem a communal tinch; pilgrims do expect sense of impartiality on the part of authorities in such matters. Sometimes nature is so hostile

that all assistance rendered proves meaningless. But then availablility of infra-structure for smooth conduct of yatra of such nature is must and it definitely requires humane approach. So far as the working of the trust constituted under Governor is concerned, it can not be blamed as it is a story of a lame duct. With stress and strain from various quarters and absence of will to exert on the part of authorities, it is a subject that would require lengthy debates. The number of unnatural deaths, due to the lack of accommodation, proper food and medical aids, needs immediate attention at national level. It is hoped that wisdom prevails on all parties concerned and that they learn to respect religious sentiments of fellow brothern and take effective steps, both for ensuring the maintenance of ecological balance as well as keeping the local traditions alive.

Krishna, instead of lamenting over something for which there is no ready remedy, prefers prescribing safe guards to yatris. He has one or two anecdotes to propose. Infact, he wants to narrate some memorable events relating to yatra, he had undertaken prior to 1990. People going on a pilgrimage to a holy cave, should know that the cave is situated at an altitude of 17300 feet, a no mean task, especially, for those who are hardly accustomed to severe cold climatic conditions. Such journeys usually demand greater endurance and will power. But then, it is a life time experience. Walking over difficult hilly terrains, rocking and jumping over mighty stones, slipping without skates on snow glacier, climbing and crawling on the stiff rocky cliffs and lastly stiffening and bending on narrow curves that have horrible depths below on one side and a perpendicular inclination of mountainous walls on the other, a real chance to train one's mind and body between the devil and the deep sea, a situation, where only balance of mind can save you from imminent misadventure. A slight tightness in shoes can make your journey trouble some. Again loose shoes can also be a great problem; while bear footed journey would be suicidal. Suitable light bedding or sleeping bags with capacity to hold eatables, warm clothing, rain protecting suits, a cap, a muffler, a jacket, preferably, fur, day to day emergency medicines and a water bottle are some of the essential items which every yatri should have in his immediate possession.

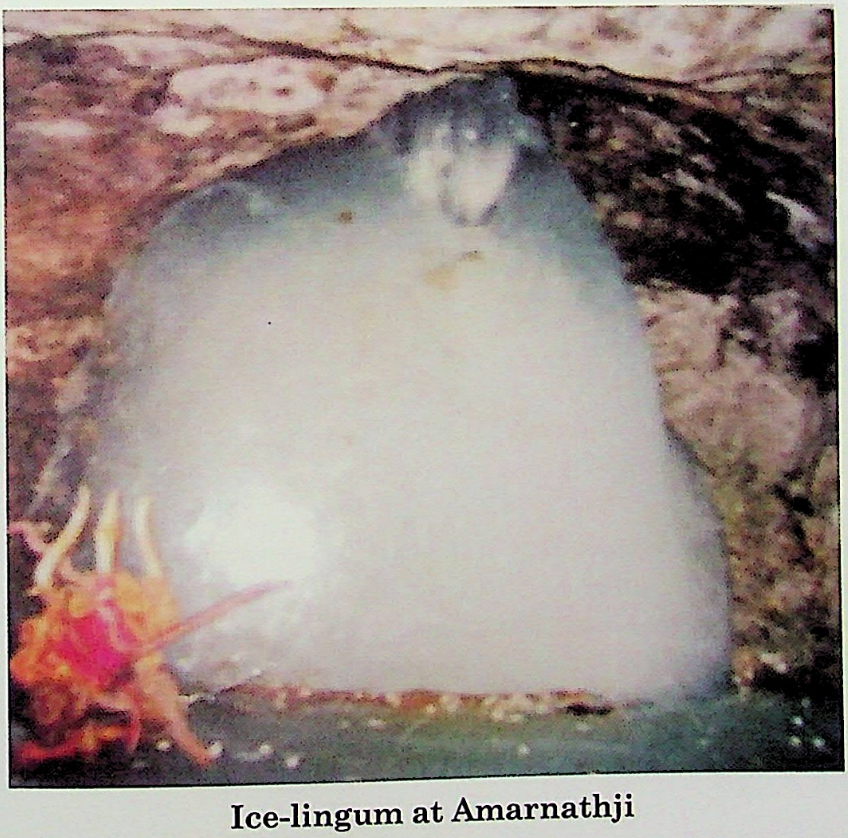
It may appear somewhat strange that Hindu Gods and Goddesses have their abode mostly on mountain tops. An extremely complex and philosophical riddle which can hardly be explained in simple

words. Probably, the essence of undertaking pilgrimage to the holy places like Gouri-Shanker/ Kailash Parvat, Gangotri, yumnotri/ Mansarovar, Badri-Nath, Kedar-Nath or to various other abodes of Siva in valley, like the holy cave of Amarnath, Haershour, Saerhour, Daenshour, Thaejvour, Maha-Deva, and Shankaracharya lies in the fact that all these places are the descriptions of his nature and his extension in a prakartik roopa/ visible form. Now, with no restriction in whatever form and whatever way a worshipper worships him, whether as Pashupati-Nath, Badri-Nath, Kedar Nath, Kashi Vishwa-Nath or Amar Nathji. He is omnipresent. One may like to concentrate in a corner of his room on only one of his forms, it hardly makes the difference. Since, Hindus, the Sanatani from the beginning have been the nature worshipper, they seek Him (God) in places where peace and tranquility resides permanently. The complexity in depicting His presence in the abodes at high altitude places, can better be ascribed to the instinct of a man expecting Him in isolation, though, He is accessible everywhere, whether on mountain peaks or otherwise. Still, there is no better place for His worhip than one on the top of the mountain (Mountain does not necessarily represent the mountain; it can be mind, one' innerself etc.). He has to be the central point, the centre of the thought process; He creates a game of an evolution that starts from shunya /zero, reaches infinity and then bounces back to Shunya or nothingness. His manifestation is in the depiction of his might, something that represents incomprehensible, unconquerable, Omni-potent and Omni-present, at the same time conceivable to human perception and with humane characteristics. Obviously, his abode has to be at commanding heights, with no easy approach.

Coming back to Amareshwara/ Amarnath ji yatra, Krishna recalls his maiden yatra with his friends. They had boarded the bus at Amira-Kadal Bus stand. After travelling for almost half an hour, they had a chance of seeing a huge python crossing the road near Pampore wouder. The driver had to stop the bus for making safe passage for the snake. On reaching Phalgam, Krishna did receive a little set back, for one of his bags containing vegetables and food items was stolen by some one in the crowd. Next two days of journey were full of events. The yatra/ trekking up to Chandanwari turned out to be quite entertaining, while night stay at the place was really delightful. People would be seen either busy cooking eatables or engaged in bhajans and Kirtans. Early next morning, the yatra to Sheshnag

resumed. The boys were somewhat uncontrollable on the track. They played all possible games. Sometimes, they lost contact of each other, but all of them would gather at the padaav. After reaching Sheshnag, some among these boys volunteered a bath at the shores of this most beautiful lake, bulish trough full of nectar with moutains surrounding all around, so inspiring a sight tobe found anywhere in the world. One of the associates after bath caught cold and was taken ill. He suffered from high fever and total exhaustion. Accordingly his portion of bag and baggage had to be shared. But the problem did not end up there. Because of high fever, the patient was hardly in a position to walk'. After frequent halts and walking at snail's pace, the party managed to reach Panchtarni, occupied some space in fully packed stone hut, which had a capacity of holding nearly three hundred people. People had tried to squeeze themselves to allow as many yatris to accommodate as possible. Such huts are the only shelters that save yatries from killer winds. Somehow, the patient was made to lie comfortably. He was given medicines. Yatries had their evening meals one by one. They ensured that they eased before entering the hut to avoide frequent movements in such a packed place'. It was time to start bhajans and Kirtans. A young girl with somewhat harsh and irritating voice started reciting a bhajan. Her recitations did not have that soothing effect or may be it was not coming right from of her heart. One gentleman in late fifties or early sixties, dressed in snown white kurta and pajama, with tremendous grace on his face and possessing the most handsome personality, accompanied by almost similarly dressed party of ten to fifteen people, addressed the girl thus, "Though you have bhakti that gives you the courage to sing the bhajan, but you need to set your heart and mind in rhythm". Suddenly, the gentle man started with Rafi number (Badi dhaer byee Kab Logay Kaber meray Ram'). There was a pin drop silence on all sides. Thus, the train of bajans started, one after another, the yatris felt spell bound. How and wherefrom the musical instruements were arranged! It was hard to guess. Bhajan of almost all top most singers, Mukesh, Mannade, Lata and so on were sung in a voice which could hardly be distinguished from original numbers. During break, Krishna ventured to ask him, who he was. He replied that he was a retired Chief Engineer from Delhi, Who had set out for yatra and had first Jagran at Vashno Devi. He said that he belonged to well to do family and in his youth, perhaps, he was the first to have bike in Delhi. Once he was riding his bike, his eyes caught sight of a poster

regarding a film "Jaagte Raho", starring Raj Kapoor and Nargis. He got so involved in the poster that he lost his control over his bike and met with a terrible accident. After his recovery, he made up his mind to be alert all the time; so he decided to keep himself in a state of Jaagte Raho for rest of his life. He told Krishna that he wanted every body to take a leaf out of this episode. The Jagran was concluded at 4 A.M. All the devotees were in favour of continuance of Jagran. But the man and his band stood up and left and others followed the suit, except of-course, Krishna and party. Now Krishna heard a man asking some Yogi standing in a crowd, if he had seen God face to face. Straight came the reply, "yes, I saw him trickling down from heavens in tiny droplets, assuming the shape of organ of creation, yet, He made his exit to complete the cycle so gracefully that I stood gazing, while He had left with the promise to reappear again. I failed to visualize, either the time or the process involved in the transformation, from the appearance of His Aakar / image or the form that subsequently changed to Nirakara, the formless form. He was playing this drama to confirm his nature." Yogi certainly referred to Siva Darshanas in the holy cave at Amar-Nathji.



Ice-lingum at Amarnathji

Scientist may associate the formation of Ice Lingum to an instant freezing of water droplets oozing from the roof top of the holy cave, which usually takes place with the start of the second fortnight, or the Shuklapaksha of Hindu month, when the nights are clear and the earth receives reflected light from the moon either partially or in total, resulting the temperature at mountain tops to fall and subsequent growth in the size of the Lingum with every passing day till it assumes full form on fifteenth day and from onwards during next fifteen days of the succeeding month, in all prevading darkness, the earth comparatively radiates more of heat, which effects slight rise in night temperature and therefore, the melting starts and accordingly, the process of diminishing of the size of lingum continues, until on fifteenth day entire physical form of the lingum is absent. This theory also corresponds to the law of nature and the phenomena of cycles at command. Therefore, the change in language does hardly matter. Now on the formation of lingum, question arises why formation at one particular point only, when water percolates at number places within the holy cave, leaving alone the droplets falling from roof of the cave centre, which may not freeze because of height and the increasing kinetic energy during the fall. Ways of Nature are mysterious and any pre-mature comment can put the person on a wrong footing. Therefore, it is better to understand the essence without championing the causes and effects put forth by way of the scientific interpretations. Every thing demands reason, but all reasons are not necessarily comprehensible and as such assumptions do prove premature at times.

People hailing from Valley have enjoyed the protection of lofty Himalayas since the days of emergence of vale out of Sati-sar. Infact, the vale has been bestowed upon with the majestically carved beauty out of rare and special combination of elements that make this very manifestation of a sacred place, a paradise to live in. He, who graced the crown that Bharatvarsha wears, depicts his Nirakara-roop (invisible form) on natural canvas at numerous point spots. Common people call these bindoos, his abodes. No wonder then that almost all the inaccessible peaks, deep water lakes, rivers and riverlets and vast meadows of Rishiwaar/ Kashir, is the reminder of his stunning presence.

The details of pilgrimage to places like Maha-Deva, Haershur, Sareshur, Danshur, and Harmukh Ganga have been given in earlier pages of this book, concluding his account on the Holy pilgrimage to Amar-Nath ji, which he had undertaken three times, prior to migration. Krishna says that he had heard a Sadhu narrating following Puranic Katha which as per the sage can help in understanding the essence behind the act of worshiping God. He says that one can attain blissful state while meditating in a corner of a room, but the experience is entirely different when one is on the path of such sacred pilgrimage. Facing all ordeals in reaching the holy cave of Baba Amar Nathji, does bless one with moments of real joy, something which is everlasting. He added that it is said that Lord Shiva chose the holy cave for narrating Amar Katha, the truth behind his immortality, specially addressed to his consort, Parvati, Who had been insisting Lord Siva to unveil the mystery, which he was not ready to divulge earlier, but seeing her curiosity, he decided to disclose the secret katha and in consequence of such a decision. He had to part first with his Vahana/ Vehicle, Nandi the Brehsba/ the Ox at Phalgam, next with crescent the Moon in his Jattas/ hair lock which he left at Chandan wari, then came the turn of Sheshnag, the Snake that Siva wore round his neck, he was to take care of a Lake named Sheshnag, ariel view of which is so spectacular, that one can hardly believe that it can be an earthly thing. It contains water with greenish blue colour, enclosed in a bowl surrounded by mountain peaks. Next was the turn of Lord Ganesha, his son, who was ordered to stop at Mahagunas and lastly he left five tattvas, air, water, ether /sky, fire and earth at Panjtarni. Now for revelation of Amar Katha to Mata Parvati in the isolated place, He chose the holy cave, but a pair of pigeons, who had their nest built in the holy cave, were fortunate to overhear the conversation and therefore, these pigeons were granted boon of immortality. Accordingly their presence in the cave is considered as most auspicious by the pilgrims.

Krishna and his associates on that occasion returned via Sonamarg. The track was difficult but distance-wise short. Walking over glaciers was so risky; one could hardly anticipate cracks in these glaciers. At places the gaps gave the sense of gushing flow of invisible streams within the glaciers. Though, the party had taken no food because of the fast that day, the decent up to Sangam as the first half of journey was not so tiring, but ascent and again descent

onwards with rains pouring from above made the track quite slippery. Somehow, they reached Baltal in the evening. Had it not been for Army base camp, things would have been quite risky. They had night halt at Baltal. In the morning Army truck took them to Sonamarg, where from the party left for home. Krishna had made a parikrama of the entire valley but before concluding the description, he wanted to take up the problem of environmental degredation. The so- called well wishers, the political fraternity and religious Zealots, who favour the curtailment of the number pilgrims to Amar Nath cave, there attention is invited to the contents contained in next chapter.

Chapter IX

Total Neglect of Ecology

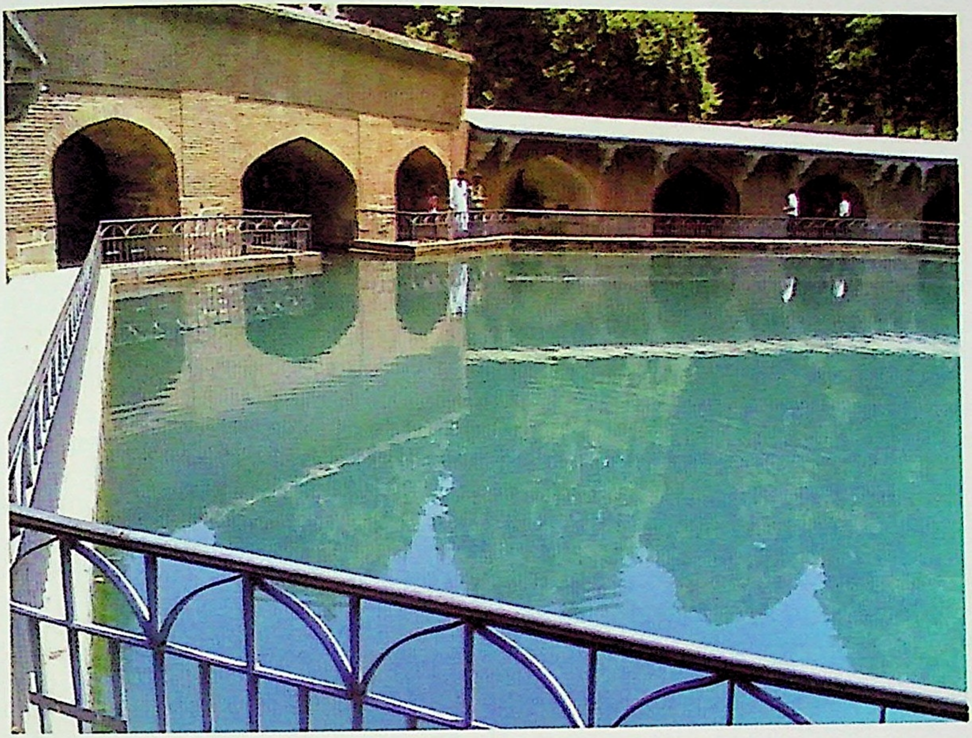
The rudiments of a change that shape the topography of a place, definitely determine the course of its environmental settings. Sometimes the changes are so slow that their path can rarely be traced or followed, while at times, these are so sudden that the tilt in the balance is noticed with quite ease. Kashmir valley has experienced both instantaneous as well as gradual transformations over the ages. But, what one observes in the valley to-day, is something that needs serious thinking. It may be surprising to know that some water bodies in the valley that existed till recently have either disappeared altogether or are in the process of facing extinction, and that this change is sudden and not gradual. It is neither the direct consequence of any geographical phenomenon, nor an outcome of any evolutionary process. Instead it is a simple case of un-checked exploitation coupled with a display of unconcerned approach towards the preservation of natural resources. Thus, the impact can, obviously, be seen as danger signal on overall ecology of the place.

Analysts suggest that after the initial emergence of vale out of the waters of Satisar, the existence of comparatively smaller water bodies here and there formed an essential feature of this Lake turned land. In-fact, during initial stages, land masses floated on the still prevalent vast expanse of water. The frequent movements of these land masses on watery surface would at times end up in crashes and collisions and subsequently, resulted in splitting of land mass or the split pieces joining together to form an Island like body, with water strips on all sides. This phenomenon of the post-emergence processes continued till these land-patches attained static character, but water continued to separate land pieces apart. The dwellers, who had sought to live on such land masses felt isolated, rather cut off from each other initially. Lateron they learnt to devise ways and means to communicate and interact with environment in gereral and amongst their fellow beings, in particular. At first they made use of wooden logs to move across the water strips, lateron learnt to fabricate primitive rafts. Wherever possible, the wooden bridges also came in to existence and many such links/ bridges, might have been erected

at numerous places, like the one in the neighbourhood of Khanda-Bhawan, as name suggests, T*arbal,* which connected the two sparsely inhabited land pieces separated by water, while the material used for such bridging might have been available in the nearby marshy lands.This constitution of land and water bonding did continue to exist till recent times, so to say up to 1960s.

Going back to the mythological description on the aftermath of the emergence of the valley from under the waters of a big lake called Sati Sara, one can co-relate the scientific connotation that once an earthquake of a very great intensity shook the bottom of a Lake, which resulted in the creation of the vale out of the water, in the form of an oval shaped bowl of dimensions nearly 85x20 square miles/ 136.8x 32.2square Km. with a solid fortification in the form of the extended branches of towering young Himalayas that continue to provide shield to this vale of beauty. It was indeed a wonderful display of nature's creation. The hills with pasture-lands, dense green forests, lakes, springs, rivers and river-lets, had all come in to existence, once the outline of the valley was drawn and defined by the features that have come to stay, in the nature of this lake turned land. For when Sati Sar had its water drained off through narrow passages offered by the newly assumed mountainous passes, or more appropriately, cracks that had developed due to great earthquake causing the land mass to assume a slight tilt or slope on its surface layer, particularly from southern end (Maraz) towards the north west side (Kamraz), resulting in so-called arid zones here and there, moreso in the southern parts of the vale. However, water did continue to ooze out of various perennial point sources, irrespective of the newly acquired background, which saved the terrains as well as low lying areas from going completely dry. But then, certain places with high altitudes in particular turned almost barren, though only for a brief period. For, it is held that due to Lord Shiva's grace people were rescued from the condition of total disappearance of water bodies from the area. They say that Kashyap Rishi, grandson of the Lord Brahma pleaded once again before Lord Siva for saving the life from extinction for want of water in the southern part of valley. The Lord struck his trident at a place, (present day Omove) near the foot hills of Peer Panchal, creating there at the spot, a spring in the form of snake,called Neel Naga for Vitasta Nadhi to emerge out of its mouth (i.e., Vitasta to originate from Neela's mouth). Some people believe

that Verinag, the originating point of Vitasta, came in to existence on an auspicious day of Veth Truvaha and since then, the day acquired the immense importance for the people of Kashmir.



Verinag Spring at Verinag Anantnag

The celebration of this occasion as the birthday of River Vitasta, is a legacy coming down to Kashmiri people even prior to Mahabharatha period, for people do find references in the great epic on the essence of the waters of the river Vitasta, described by none other than Lord Krishna himself. Vitasta, worshipped as Goddess Parvati by the native people, did assume different names with the passage of time. Persians called it Behat; Greek knew it as Hydaspes, while some people associate it with the prosperous town of Jhelum in Pakistan occupied Kashmir. The ancient texts, like Nilamat Purana, contain some references which seem to endorse the postulations made earlier that the upper reaches of Kashmir became almost dry after the great earh-quake. Accordingly Goddess Parvati at the request of Lord Siva and Kashyap Rishi, agreed to assume the form of Vitasta river. She, with such a manifestation, intended to wash the sins of the people besides bestowing upon them the nector of life.

Referring to other available religious scriptures, on the source of river Vitasta, some believe its source to be at Panchasta or Punizethi (Conglomeration of five hundred springs), while some believe Narsinggarh is the actual source point, as referred to in Vitasta Mahamya. Some call the main source of the river by the name of Veth vitur. Wherever and whatever the source may be, all the religious and holy texts hold Verinag as a tirtha of great importance. Mughal King, Jahangir erected the stone outline of the spring in 1612 C.E and was also responsible for constructing a sarai for pilgrims at Omoveh. The reason behind all this is that the sacred river has been a life line of the valley and is the complete and collective portrayal of all its tributaries that feed it and subsequently add to its volume during its course of flow. Lidder Kolh (Lombodhari), Tresandhya, Aadoonadhi, Ducksomnalleh, Nallas of Aachbal Nag, chakaha-Nadhi of Mattan Nag, Nagbal Nag of Anantnag, Kokarnag, Rambh Areh and Kownsarnag (Veshnovpadh, whose waters ultimately result in what is known as Aharbal fall) and many other small stream, including Sandran, Bringe, Arapath, Veshav and Rembysar discharging their waters into it, last five of these streams meet with Vitasta at a place called Sangam near village Litterh (At Sangam Bridge on National High way). As the river moves further down, DoodGanga also joins it. By the time it reaches the city of Srinagar, it assumes the shape of a mighty river which is preparing to confront in its course the waters of another mighty river called Sindhu Nadi, the valley branch of river Indus, a stream coming down from Zoojela merging at Baltal into the branch of Amarganga (Amrawati from Amar Nath Ji)that flows with tributaries in various other streamlets, their confluence is given the name of Syhand (Sindhu Nadi), which swiftly flows through North Kashmir and meets various other tributaries in the form of streams and streamlets like Kranknadhi (Kankani at Naranag some ten Km. from Kangan) before entering into wedlock with Vitasta Nadhi at Shadipura Sangam-Prayagraj. Further onwards Vitasta confronts the waters of Wullar Lake, in Bandipora) and later on emerging out of the waters of this biggest fresh water lake of India, for swallowing down the waters of Mudhumatinadhi, Erin, Phore and Kishan Ganga.

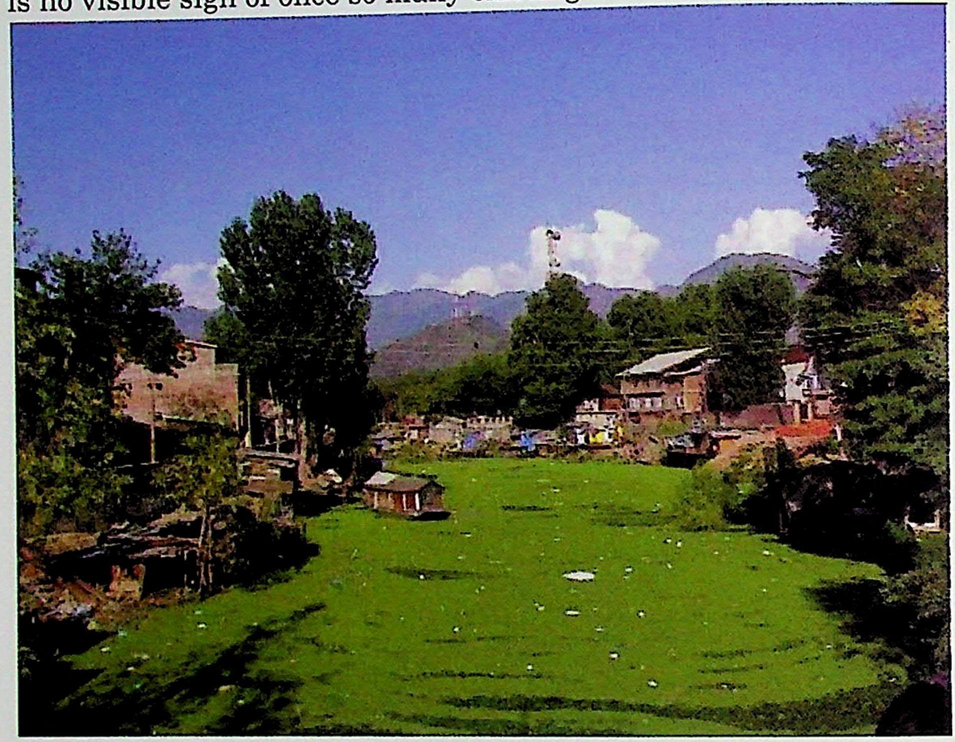
Thus, with this map of rivers in Kashmir, Vitasta and Sindu Nadi ought to have been brimming with crystal clear waters. Obviously it is not so, especially at present, for the rivers whose

tributaries suffer ailment can not remain in healthly condition for a long.

Going back to the times, when water from perennial sources, whether in south, north or west parts of the valley, had no definite pathway. The frequent change in the course of flow would be a common experience. At times, uneven land formation would display deep cracks or fissures and thus resulting in deposition of water and sometimes big blockades in the form of rocks, apparently as big as a hill, caused water logging and hindrance in the free and smooth flow. The accumulation of water and subsequent re-emergence of water bodies, would at times force the people to migrate to the upper reaches as before. Such situations were more frequent with the setting in of the spring and the rainy seasons. Once snow started melting on mountain tops, rivers and river-lets would get swelled up. Lakes and ponds also increased their discharge, which quite often overflowed the embankments and thus caused the temporary revival of water body seemingly as big in dimension as that of the Sati-Sar. The water bodies so formed did hardly dry up till the approach of the next winter, thus giving birth to marshy patches or water strips on permanent bases. Though rivers and riverlets established their courses, the bonding between land and water continued as such. Thus, a unique constitution in due course of time helped in shaping and rehabilitating this abode of Kashap Rishi with variety of life forms. Consequently, the climatic conditions or the geographical contours came to be defined, which influenced the overall behaviour of the upcoming settlements.

The hypothesis that Krishna is trying to evolve, has an obvious reference to the disappearance of number of water bodies either because of neglect in their upkeep or for what the planners call sealing the unproductive water sources for the sake of the development of the place.The later thought process is quite disturbing and if left unchecked would certainly prove more disastrous for the bio-network / ecosystem than is usually anticipated by experts and critics. Hardly forty years back Srinagar was something like an Island city, the heaven on earth. It had brimming Vitasta, flowing right through its middle, Nallas and channels connected the main river with the city periphery comprising of Lakes and water bodies almost on all side. Those who happen to know the topography of various parts of this Sun-city or the city of Godess Sri, especially, parts like, Rainawari

or Batmaloo-Chandmari or for that matter of fact even the down town areas, they would acknowledge the fact that these areas of the city were till recently separated from each other by lakes, water strips and wet marshy land patches, but that is now a thing of past. There is no visible sign of once so many existing water bodies.



Choonth Kulh at Soothu Barbar Shah Srinagar

In-fact, most of the places that Krishna is talking about are currently facing acute water shortage. Therefore, it provides sufficient material feed back regarding the extent of neglect and toll it must have taken so far eco-system of the place is concerned. Evidently, the conditions of the still surviving water bodies can hardly be called as being satisfactory. The overall economic development and material progress has not only changed the life-style of people, it has made them prodigal as well. The tendency to raise huge mansions at places that ought to have been out of reach of any individual, craving for living kingsize life and ravaging the nature despite the knowledge of well tested perception that life exists when nature is alive and where interaction is within the permissible limits. The practice of milking nature without providing it a space to recoup is an invasion on the constitution, governing the laws of nature.

People talk of saving Dal Lake from death. Government claims spending millions of rupees for the purpose. But instead of any sign of improvement, its size is decreasing, pollution level increasing; its depth is a cause for concern, while slitting has plugged its water sources and weed is growing at rapid rate. With absolutely no check on the growth of weeds, the schemes involving de-weeding measures bear hardly any result except that these schemes serve as gold mines for those whose job is to feed on the funds earmarked. The people involved are least bothered regarding the survival of this world famous Lake. Their interest lies in filling their own coffers. They are always on look out for opportunities that offer the ways and means of enhancing their bank balance manifold. Who can stop these elements from robbing the nation off tax payer's money or restrict the bloody culprits from encroaching upon the already squeezed size of the lake? Their greed for grabbing land in and around the lake and adding to the already large number of existing boats that straight way dump human excreta into the lake leaves hardly any scope for improvement. The politics of exploitation is there to safeguard their interests. Even the best schemes are doomed to prove failure here, because there is no sincerity.These people have been taught that nature is for Ashrafulmakluuk. Unless People realise that they live a comfortable life because of the lake and if the lake dies, who would bear the consequences. Why don't they stop creating replicas of Nishat Baghs for every house boat and a hotel that they own on the already grabbed water space? They should know that continued interference in the working of nature is sure to create havoc. They are owner only for the present. The charge they hold, viz the property that they managed to register in their name either by fair or foul means, is only temporarily in their name, as some one-else shall take the charge of this possession, sooner or later. Would it not, therefore, be prudent to harness the wealth of nature to the extent, it meets their present requirements. It is no use killing a hen laying golden eggs just to capture the gold mine in a single day. Such acts simply invite disasters? Nature is all powerful; it rarely needs artificial ornamentation for its beauty. If people try to meddle in its working unnecessarily, the results would obviously be horrible. The destruction that people have brought to the beauty of nature in Phalgam is for all the people to see. People should know that compartmentazation and creation of recreational parks or erecting walls enclosing pastures just to earn money, shows only the ignorance

on the part of authorities, who behave like the band of hot heads. They believe in exploiting such beautiful places for past time (Fish catching) sites alone. They have no notion of what it means to encourage constructing big buildings, hotels and residential houses at places like Gulmarg and pahalgam. They can hardly understand that these places ought to have been kept aloof from human habitation on permanent bases. Atleast, new buildings, hotels and resturants and even market places should not have come up. At the most construction a few hutments for tourists should have been allowed. Vehicular traffic in such areas should have been restricted and properly moniteered. Setting up of any industrial unit in the vicinity should have been avoided for maintaining pollution free atmosphere.



Babdem an offshoot of Dal Lake

Back to the disappearance of the network of water bodies, especially, in the city of Srinagar, which should be a cause of concern, for it not only deprives people of healthy environs, but also creates the dearth of outlets for rain waters to flow out without stagnation and subsequently cause frequent floods. We have the instance, of Nalla Marh, the waters of which circled round almost the entire city. It covered vast areas, assimilating all discarded material during the course of its journey, till it reached Gilsar, Khushal Sar (presently so to say non existing) and from there through the water way to

Sadhapora carrying city wastes to suitable sites for the safe disposal and proper usage, before its culmination at a place called Soura, where it ultimately merged into the waters of Anchar lake, which at present is in a pathetic condition. Water channels natural or man made, wherever these existed, in and around the dry land masses, had of-course their origin mostly in Lakes and springs. While Marh Nallah started its journey from Babdem, Brari Deva, an offshoot of Dal Lake, provided a passage for smooth and easy water transport system both for men and material. Fresh vegetables and food items used to be shifted from one place to other in small boats plying over Mar canal; it also helped in the preservation of eco-system of interior areas of the city with its non- stagnant water flow. Like-wise, Nallah Amir Khan, Kteh Kolh, Choont Kolh, Lachmankolh Chandmarh, Doodh-Ganga and various other Kuls and channels nourished, beautified and helped in connecting various parts including the outskirts of the city in one way or the other.

The treasure of beauty that nature had bestowed upon this vale, in the form of land pieces virgin, pollution free lakes, crystal clear springs, vastness of fertile rice field sunk in water for most of the time, unique saffron fields on wooders, tranquility of the forests with the imposing chinars, determining populars, graceful willows, evergreen deodar and needled pine trees, on charming hill slopes followed by the refreshing calmness of green plushy meadows, variety of wild flowers, sweetest fruits that one could dream of existing anywhere on the surface of this planet and last but not the least the singing silvery brooks joining the milky riverlets running down the slopes of mountains from the snow clad tops. All this could well be summed up as the features perfectly designed and integrated by nature, making so obvious for the vale to acquire the status of" Paradise on earth". No wonder then, Abul Fazl, the guide, Philosopher-friend and Chronicler (story teller) of Akbar, the Great Mughal King, once wrote that "This piece of land on earth is enchanting and deservedly appropriate to be either the delight of worldly pleasure of loving people or the retired abode of the recluse. Its streams are sweet to the taste, its waterfalls music to the ear, its climate stimulating."

However, equally disheartening is the fact that consciously or otherwise, the very formation or the composition of these essential rudiments, is continuously being disturbed by elements that have

been allowed to emerge in post-independent era. The people at the helm of affairs hardly know the adverse effects that such disturbances do have on the preservation of this gift of nature.



Ali Masjid at Eid-Gah

Some body has rightly said that floods and draughts are complimentary to each other, if one is left uncared for other would over-ride. The vivid recollection of the hysterical beauty of nature, in the proximity of Khanda Bhawan, especially, while going down Sadhpura road, once a treat to an eye, but presently no more in existence, really hurts and fills one with great remorse. There was a time when this picturesque setting, inexpressible in words, would mesmerize people, but unfortunately, the economic growth and the exploitation in the name of modernization has brought with it terrible devastation, as a result of which such surroundings have completely lost their originality. Is it not disgusting to learn that the saner elements have remained mute spectators all this time on such vital issues? It is fact that Kashmiris by temperament have been nature loving people. For them God actually resides in nature and its beauty. They appreciated and acknowledged the power of this beauty and considered it worth worshipping. While adoring nature in all forms, each particular form had a special significance attached to it. Even, during the times, when economic means were limited, they welcomed

both snow fall and the Sun-shine with the same spirit. Chilly winter, no-doubt, did restrict their frequent out door movements, but never deprived them of the sense of enjoying the beauty of nature in varied forms and colours. In fact, it taught them to master the crafts that suited both their environment and mood. Difficult winter months provided these people the opportunity to put on the canvas, the living beauty of nature, ensuring thereby both economic stability in their life style as also the means to exhibit love for it. These people enjoyed variety of feasts that supplemented the much needed energy for the delicate work that they did indoors. With the ushering of spring season, a new warmth in life of the people would be felt everywhere. The people would start venturing out into the field, as nature called them either in the form of flowering of Yamberzal, Kreedfly and Sangjefuly (flowering of Telgagul/ Mustered plants etc) or of budding leaves that declared the welcoming season. A cool breeze in early hours followed by warm sunlight of the noon, especially, in early spring season, beckoned old and the young and did compel them to come out of their houses for taking much needed sun baths. People, who lived in the vicinity of Eid-Gah, would usually be seen visiting the place from very first day of the spring. There would be a great festivity at least on two successive Sundays before falling of Navreh festival (celebrations of first day of Kashmiri Hindu Calendar). Hundreds of families both Hindus and Muslims with their Samovars full of boiling tea and Kulchas in Tokris would be seen in clusters on the green plushy ground around Ali-Masjid. At this point of time, the weather would usually be wet and the parents would take extra care, lest, their children get trapped in marshy patches. But then the sweet cool breeze blowing would be so refreshing, that even elderly people would get excited and would start taking part in playful games. Alas! The beautiful atmosphere is no more visible today. It may be hard to believe that once highly placed and well to do intellectual class, from surrounding areas enjoyed both mornings / evening walks on Eid-Gah Sadhpura road. The flora and fauna of this particular area was so fascinating that the very sight of the place would leave the person spell bound. Unfortunately within a span of thirty to forty years, the place has undergone a change beyond recognition. Except for green turf of Eid-Gah, all its beauty is gone. We have now thousands of big palatial buildings erected here and there, with a network of narrow lanes and bye lanes and hardly any water body visible around. Even Khushal Sar, a lake, once famous for lotus roots

is reportedly being converted into a play ground and is probably the site for the school. Why over-exploitation of natural resources has continued unabated and why people pay no heed to the preservation part of it? Is it not a matter of serious concern? The gloomy picture in regard to the up-keep of all water bodies both for sustenance of the present as well as future generations, hardly needs any further elaboration.

It would be in the fitness of things to repeate here that the Kashmiri people do have for ages worshipped nature in various forms. Whether it be a mountain top, a river, a spring, a lake, or a huge chinnar /Mulberry tree, or an animal like a cow, an elephant, or even for that matter of fact any other creation of nature like the seasonal changes etc. All these were considered objects of worship. Krishna, whose neighborhood is being discussed, recalls that during his childhood days, it was a usual sight to see flower petals, in early morning hours, floating over the surface of the waters of river Vitatasta. No body would dare to throw garbage or filth into it. Maintaining of the sanctity of water bodies was the essential (the basic) feature of Kashmiri culture. Well, it is true that worshiping of springs, rivers and river-lets may not be of any consequence to a modern man, but at the same time it is worth understanding that the very essence behind this worship was to keep these water bodies alive. That is why the rivers in Kashmir were mostly free from pollution in by-gone days and that is why these survived and in turn served as the life lines of the society. Almost all the rivers like Vitasta, Sindu Nadhi/Amarganga or Amravati, Doodganga, Krank Nadhi,*Kishanganga and Madumati originating from different mountain tops, were the living deities, personifying the great Ganges. It is highly disappointing that these rivers have either shrunk in size and have changed or have been forced to change their natural course. In certain cases over-exploitation has reduced their discharge considerably. Vitatsta, Sind and Dood-Ganga are some of the instances in this regard. Before getting drifted farther away, it is better to leave it, for the readers frame the opinion.

Chapter X

Krishna's Perspectives

Kashmir Parikrama was actually expected to conclude with the topic "Neglect of ecology". But, somehow, Krishna had a sudden beckoning that prompted him to acknowledge that his journey had not been over as yet. Obviously, it meant that he could not have his exit from the scene. He immediately checked his steps and started reflecting on the development of a post-thought, the incidence of which he could hardly ignore. He asked himself whether the journey he had undertaken had served the purpose it was intended to or else the efforts put in were all waste. He was conscious that something very significant had missed the sight of the observer in him. It took him some time to ponder and arrive at the conclusion. Sudden recollection of the events that had led to the mass exodus of his community in1989-90, of which he himself had been the victim of struck his mind. Though, the genocide of religious minority of Kashmir had drawn condemnation at the international levels, but only years after the heinous crime had been comitted. Such emotional aspects did trouble him a lot. He felt highly disturbed at the way situation was handled by almost at all levels. Lip sympathy was all that the people had offered to these unfortunate ab-origines of the vale. How could he overlook or brushoff the reference to the catastrophe that killed thousands and forced lakhs of people to say goodbye to the paradise on earth? Distressed and disgusted at the way things had taken the course, he cursed himself and all others for having allowed the religious bigots to execute their treacherous designs in dragging him, his family members and his entire community out of the homes without having offered the slight resistance. But then, such a step at that time would have been sucidial and it would not have meant wining the war, but an invitation to more trouble for his fellow people. Thus, the gun-weilders had succeeded in forcing mass migration of innocent people only because they did not belong to their religion and that their nationality was Indian. The bitter memories of the terrible mayhem, the splitting of blood all in the name of Jihad, the so called holy war, unleashing a reign of terror everywhere which did frighten even the people of their faith. They too were worried about the safety of their children and

women folk. Most of the well to do families amongst them had shifted temporarily to Jammu and other parts of the country. Meanwhile, the number of local Hindus killed in the valley had risen to more than thousand in a matter of days, just on the pretext that the killed ones were enemy agents / Mukhbirs. Houses were burnt, property looted and temples and shrines desecrated and destroyed. Thus, after all these ordeals that the hapless people went through, it was difficult to deny the fact that migration that time was the only solution left for these unfortunate people. During next quarter of a century, these people kept waiting in the expectation that they would be resettled for better future in days to come, but nothing of that sort happened. State had utterly failed to protect the life and property of the people. Therefore, the migrants were really justified in asking for their resettlement at a place in their land of birth, both on their terms and conditions and of their choice under the provisions of the constitution of India and International laws that provided various safe gaurds for the citizens in a democratic set up especially, people who have been denied right to live, who were thrown our forceably and crimes committed against them had not been registered even. The demands of resettlement of the displaced people in their place of origin was something obligatory for the state accept in principle. The fact that state has the fundamental responsibility of ensuring the safety, welfare and well being of the citizens. It has to safeguard minority against infringement of their rights. The law abiding citizens expected that they would be given protection against the religious persecution and fear of gun. They trusted their guardians that they would act sincerely and bring culprits to book all those, who had committed inhuman crimes. But nothing of that sort happened. Therefore, the people, whose kith and kin were killed and who were forced to leave their home and hearth at the point of gun; it was no sin to ask for what they were genuinely entitled to. Again, seeking status as displaced persons was no crime. They had the right to ask for minority status as the minority community of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. But the way the members of this displaced community were forced to scatter in absence of any viable means of earning/ livelihood, is a clear indication of the foul play the people concerned were at. This has served the purpose of vested elements, who always wanted to see that the migrant community being rendered as people of no consequence. Migrants on their part were in the expectation of some one like Mr.Jag Mohan ji to come to their rescue. But, such people,

who stand for value based politics and are sincere in the discharge of their duty, do come on the scene rarely. Jag Mohanji not only worked in the interests of nation, but saved the section of the population from total annihilation. He made them to stand on their feet instead of becoming begging bowls. No-doubt, the displaced people did make good use of the chances that came their way, which is obvious from the fact that the community lives the displaced life with dignity and honour. Most of the community members may also be well off and may have purchased land or houses elsewhere, but then, they know that these houses lack the feel of a home.They may live wealthy life outside, but their hearts would always bleed for the love of their mother land, the crown of India. These people are in need of a home not a house. The aggressors should understand that every migrant aspires for a home in birth place and he will ensure that his dream comes true some day in near future. He seeks his home in a place, where political exploitation has no scope, where there is no distinction on the bases of religion, caste, creed, colour or nationality, a place, where people are ready to work for the welfare of all, where scientific thinking prevails all the time, where all modern facilities are available, where there is a space for truth and Dharma, where science and technology, cultural ethos, traditions and customs go together, where developmental works are for better future, where no one dies of poverty, hunger or disease, where every one has a roof to shield himself from heat and cold, where taxes are paid voluntarily, where basic amenities, viz ; fresh air, water, food, fuel, electricity, medical facilities and other essential commodities are available for all during all the twenty four hours and where there is no fear of gun. Krishna does not believe in making castles in air, his approach is that of a realist. He believes in shaping things with a sole purpose of realizing the goal. He asks his brothers not to lose hope, have faith for better future and life of happiness, for light has to follow darkness, so shall good days follow the hard times. He knows of the impediments, the hurdles created or the ailments his birth place suffers from; but he is sure that somebody would rise to the occasion and resolve the issues ensuring justice to all, especially, the people who had been driven out of their homes for no fault of theirs. Let the people enjoy the beauty of the vale, the paradise on Earth without fear of gun.

Krishna is aware that there is complete lack of understanding amongst different sections of the society in his native place. There is no love lost amongst them. Lack of sincerity and absence of principles

makes the problem complicated and grievous. But then one has to understand why some misguided people should raise the slogan of Azadi. Do they think that seeking so called Azadi, would make all of them the rulers or the chief Ministers and the Ministers. Do they think that they would have the license to do anything they want, kill anybody or everybody in the name of religion, or marry anyone they wish to or purchase land for construction of houses on the shores of Dal-Lake. Do they mean that so called Azadi can ensure them the liberty of doing anything anytime without fear of state rules and regulations? If everybody started thinking that he was free to do what he wanted, it would lead to chaos and anarchy and not freedom. Otherwise, keeping international parameters in to consideration, Muslims in Kashmir enjoy maximum Azadi/ freedom in all the spheres including politics that people envy elsewhere. It hardly needs elaboration that Kashmiri Muslims dominate in all walks of life in state as well as in the country. There is hardly any city or town in the country, where Kashmiris do not have business establishments and show rooms. Except heavy industries, valley has all institutions, and establishments that it can feel proud of. Valley constitutes very small part/ portion of the state, but it enjoys maximum representation in the formation of the govt. In-fact; the number exceedes far more than required for the formation of Govt. Again, the number of valley based employees in govt. service exceede manifold as compared to other two regions. It is the valley which has been politically or otherwise, dominating the other two regions. The chief Minister has to be from the valley. Beaurocracy is mostly from the valley. Thousands of students from valley receive scholarships for studying in different universities of the country. In short, the people of other two regions have virtually been reduced to second class citizenship. Maximum funds are allocated to the valley and it can boast of number of prestigious Institutions. Thus, with this back-ground, what does a normal man expect out of Azadi? Slogans should have been raised against those who do not allow poorest of the poor to take the benefit of the facilities that valley is provided with, but they misuse and abuse the constitution. One wonders, what Kashmiri Muslims mean by the term Azadi. Are they denied access to law or are they prevented from expressing their views even if these are anti-national? Majority of Kashmiri Muslims enjoys financial stability. They can take part in any political activity.The problem with them is that they have excessively been pampered and that fundamentalism has taken top

seat in their minds. They have all the facilities available and so to channelize their energies, they need a garbage ground and thus, political exploitation is their past time. They are given to understand that they are the only people who can approach God and that He has entrusted them the duty of spreading the faith. They believe in expansion of the reach of their religion within and outside the state of J&K, so that they have control over people of the world. Economic disparities do prevail amongst sections of the society, but certain people want this disparity to remain. After all they need somebody to carry guns, throw bombs and pelt stones and people with sound education and economic base would seldom do such jobs. The down trodden are the people, the exploiters need, otherwise, once these people are educated, acquire economic stability, they would certainly turn tables on these exploiters. Thus, the reason that this vicious circle is bound to continue. The veil of duplicity that the exploiters wear often distracts the eyes of the beholder. These people know never to live in peace and harmony. It is this trait in them that has turned paradise on earth into hell.Obviously, establishing a well meaning contact amongst the different faiths and sects or maintaining peace and tranquility in a complex society of this nature, is not possible, unless, a mechanism to create an environment of trust based on truth and fair play, is evolved. But, when there is a little hope of any agreement on safeguarding human values, one cannot expect good results out of wrong doings, especially, when the politics of exploitation, falsehood and dishonestly runs the roost. There is a history behind such a state of affairs and only revolutionary measures can redeem the situation. Communists say that sacrifice is must for saving the mankind from complex problems. For the survival and safety of crores of people, dealing firmly with few rogue and insane elements is a lesser price to pay. However, before such policies are put to practice, one must exhaust all available means at disposal. Concerned people should study the history and geography in totality.

Entire decade of 1950s can be considered as a transition period in the history of this country. During this period, politics was taking long strides both at the centre as well as at the state levels. The state of J&K also witnessed a complete restructuring of political system, of-course, with understanding between the leadership at the National level and the Kashmir based politicians. The resulting set up was expectedly valley-centric. The other two regions were quite

unevenly poised against valley.The new political dispensation, offered very little scope for the development of Jammu or Ladakh regions, barring few selected pockets, where majority of the people were their co-religionists, who henceforth represented this region on various economic and political fronts, despite their number in Jammu region being in minority. In the valley, the political establishment started dismantling all that had even a far relation with the past. Voices of Ladakh region appeared inaudible and divided and were accordingly ignored for a while. Now, those within the valley who would have put up some resistance were shown the door. After-all, for the new set up, there was no reason to tolerate the unwanted elements that were to create obstacles in their path. To ensure elimination of all irritants, laws were enacted and enforced in the state with the active participation of those, who enjoyed free hand first time after transition of power. Certain sections of the populace did feel alienated and dejected. In such an enthusiastic atmosphere, the state of Jammu and Kashmir became first to enact the law regarding transference of the ownership of land to tillers without any compensation to the affected parties. While it did benefit the social fabrics to an extent, but a sizeable section of the society was left high and dry. It gave a signal to those, who were yet to recognize and reconcile with the change. It was too hard for this section of people to face the consequences of the unilateral decision enforced upon them by the ruling class. They felt helpless as they had not thought of such an unexpected enactment that would render them without any life support. No body would have opposed the law, had it not been applied so harshly. Paddy land owners had been deprived of their land over night without any compensation, relief or any favourable provision, except a ceiling of few Kanals. Even this initial ceiling provided was later on done away with by fixing a nominal payment of Rs. 250/- per Kanal as compensation for transference of 50% of the piece of land left after the operation of first ceiling. It was not only inadequate but a cruel joke in the name of compensation to those who were wholly and solely dependent on the land yields. The transfer of ownership to the tillers without taking care of atleast the poorest of the poor amongst the owners created a wedge never to be filled. As state subjects these people have now the right to ask these tillers, who are presently well off and need not work in the fields themselves, what justification they have in retaining these pieces of land, when they engage/ hire Behari labrourers for tilling that land? Why do they

enjoy the yields sitting in their homes or offices, while tiller works for them? Does such a law not constitute a disparity? Haven't the earlier owners a definite reason to feel disillusioned? They have the right to ask questions as to why ceiling was imposed only in the respect of paddy lands and not for orchards and other immoveable properties. Since, these policy decisions had their roots somewhere in activities started two decades prior to independence and by the time the enactment for implementation was passed, the politicians had already gained free hand and favourable ground. They did not hesitate in declaring their theocratic agenda. These people were absolutely clear in letting their intentions known to those who already knew that their existence depended on three point formulae, Chalunn, gallunn ya rallunn, (Running away or embracing death or else accepting conversion.), later two conditions were not acceptable to sophisticated cowardice. The feeling of deprivation and self guilt amongst a small portion of this section of population, who were blamed of having soft corner for the former rulers or the leaning towards the ruling party at centre were sure to invite trouble sooner or later. Fearing that their future was not secure under these circumstances, they decided to leave the arena at the earliest. However, there was another group of the people, who strived for buying peace and seeking compromise. But their approach of appeasment never convinced the majority community, these people failed with their innovative ideas to correct the so called wrong doings of their fore-fathers during autocratic rule.They even went to the extent of accepting that only they were responsible for the innumerable sufferings during autocratic rules. This group of people coined their own term to give shape to their so called secularistic thoughts, moulded many intellectuals, technocrats, physicians and beaurocracts mostly from their community to take their side and at one time, these people got applause for setting a model for rebuilding Naya Kashmir. Perhaps, the people at the helm of affairs were not so sincere and had something different in their mind, or the people who participated in such campaign, could not read the writing on the wall properly, so visible from the very first day of the transfer of the power. These secularists ought to have realized that the course they had been offered had no future for them as they were always under the eye of suspicion. They should have known that their very presence was not considered auscipious. It was only for timely excegencies that they had unwillingly allowed them to occupy some

space and once their purpose was served they were to be thrown like fly out of milk. Why they failed to understand the implications of the first enactment, followed by reservation policy and subsequent biased policies and politics, which clearly meant that those, who depended wholly and solely either on white collar jobs or wet land farming should wind up as early as possible. The purpose here is not to oppose the enactment of the Land to tillers, as it did have justifiable reasons to an extent, but then Government ought to have been impartial both in the enactment and its implementation ensuring that no one was deprived of his bread and butter. The exodus of well to do section of the society had taken place earlier also, which did not catch the eye of the public in general, probably every one intentionally ignored it. In-fact, such a process had commenced right from early fifties.

In those days, Srinagar city comprised of areas from Amira Kadal /Rajbagh to Chattabal and Rainawari to Batmalloo. Pandits were in majority in most of these areas in the city, especially, along both the sides of river vitatsta from Amira Kadal to Safa Kadal and even beyond except some Muslim dominated patches, like Gow Kadal, Feteh Kadal to Zaina Kadal excluding Gadha kocha, left of Nawa Kadal to Safa Kadal area. New colonies developed later on in Chandmari, Dewan Bagh/ Karan-Nagar and Jawahar Nagar, which also attracted more of pandits than Muslims. Thus, the number of pandits in the city of Srinagar, though passive and individualistic in character, would not have been a miniscule minority. Had they been assertive in protecting their rights from the start, things might have been still better in the cities of Srinagar, Anantnag and Baramulla if not everywhere. Post independence period, saw the leaders from Kashmiri Hindu community making their mark in the central politics, but all of them had failed to address the genuine grieviences of their community members back at home. Infact, they remained absolutely unconcerned of the well being of their community and misearably failed to assist them in strengthening their hold on to their roots. The migration of Kashmiri Pandits in ones and twos continued non-stop either on the pretext for higher studies, jobs or business purposes, or else the preference for peaceful atmosphere inview of their dependence on others for their safety. The continued dispersion in cities within and also outside the country further resulted in weakening their base. Again, as far as their shifting to posh areas within Srinagar city is concerned, it exposed them to psychological stresses, insecurity and expected eventualities. As reservation policy

became common feature in all spheres of life. Trade and business with schemes and conditions favourable to majority community in Kashmir, the people from minority community had a tough competition from their counterparts. However they were still preferred till seventies, where it came to a choice between them and Jammu based people. With little prospect of survival in view of the policy of reservation in seats and posts in technical and other institutions of higher learning, lack of capital and viable atmosphere for business, made them feel frustrated. By the end of nineteen eighties, the picture had entirely changed. With the start of the turmoil in 1989, their fate had become evidently clear. It was, perhaps, the approaching end of Kashmiri pandit culture. Their migration did not only cut them off their roots, but forced them to amalgamate their Identity as Kashmiri Pandit in the ocean of humanity. It also devoided them of cherished values for which they had suffered for generation after generation. Within first two decades of their migration, the very concept of family changed for them, the family members were forced to live separately hundreds of miles apart. The bond that existed in the relationships was no longer there. Number of marriages solemnized outside viz inter-caste and inter-community marriages in the community became the order of the day. The trend attributed to the lack of parental care as a result of separation by longer distances and exposure to alien atmosphere.The number of such cases thus increased so abnormally that within two or three decades, it would be difficult to locate a Kashmiri pandit, unless some miracle happens and a distinct culture is saved from total extinction. It is not that Kashmiri Pandits as a community was opposed to openness, but that things should have occurred on such a large scale where end of that culture is inevitable, was hardly expected. After all, pandits did not leave their home and hearth only because of the fear of gun. They had opted out of valley to make their countrymen know the worst situation prevailing in the most important part of the country, of-cource, they had also protected their religion from invasion and most importantly it was an effort to ensure their culture survives. Had it been only the threat of gun, they would have easily opted for the politics of opportunism by straight way extending helping hand to the wielders of gun, rather than bidding farewell to the heaven for a change of destination from oasis to a complete desert, where they had no ready prospects of food, water and shelter. Fair enough, that time nobody had the slightest idea

that they would be provided with relief of any kind and it was as risky an exercise as facing gun, for heat, hunger and penury posed greater and far more painful threat of death than gun, which was instantaneous. Was it for nothing that the people faced mass massacre and preferred migration? The dispersion and exposure of docile community to experiences hitherto unknown, where problems, which should have been addressed to in the interests of nation, it did not happen, because people at the helm of affairs, had no idea of the war the country had to fight against Jehadies. However, credit goes to individual Kashmiri Pandits, whom once foreign and national media termed as self-proclaimed intellectuals. At least, they did prove to the world that they had not run away for fear of death and that no individual could motivate them to do so, they were the people who valued human life, their culture and above all had the vision to foresee the dangers engulfing the entire humanity. They were the first to raise the alarm, no matter that they were not taken seriously or that nobody gave any heed to their cries, till one day the spectators across the world found their own homes set on fire.

Muslims form the majority community in Kashmir. They are, perhaps, amongst very few communities in the entire sub-continent, who within a short span of fifty years witnessed an extraordinary leap from rages to riches, of-course, because of their faith in their leadership. Fortunately, things proved favourable for them, as the leaders at the centre were no match for the local leaders in the game of politics. They brought changes designed to favour their folk and exploited the changes to the maximum. The people in general also learnt the art of political exploitation from their political masters. Thus an era of opportunism and corruption was to usher in. Those who displayed the art better got themselves well settled, while weak and meek were left behind. But, with flow of money, the rapid growth of awareness was obvious and thus, the weapons of exploitation passed on to common man. Pelf brought changes beyond recognition. People witnessed transformation from simple to most modern and fashionable life styles. While people, at one time, were used to such primitive things as Tongas, hand driven Raidas, shikaras, journey on horse back and tattos, or lifting loads on back, but all these experiences were things of the past. The revolution in transport system or for that matter of fact, in all spheres of life, including professional careers obviously could never be dreamt off and they

recognized all these developments, because they knew where they were heading to. Elderly people may recall that the houses they owned earlier were mostly made of unbaked dried clay bricks, mud and wood. Thin wooden planks placed on poles with layers of dry grass or bhojpatra cover, with dark soil spread all over, served the roof, (This type of roof sometimes bore living plants and shrubs as well). These roofs would more often leak during rains or snow fall. With economical advancement these roofs were replaced by slightly better and modified roofs and the use of bhojpatra and earth was abandoned, instead small wooden pentagonal pieces nailed in a particular fashion over slanted wooden planks were used, (Singhal in place of earthy layer on bhojpatra), which again came to be replaced, but this time with costly iron sheets on star balm roofs over concrete and multi-storeyed buildings. All these changes happened between 1950 and 1980. While the huts they lived in earlier had a charm of its own and it did represent a simple life style, with speedy advancement in the field of science and technology and funds enough and to spare, things changed altogether. Thus, younger generation have hardly the reason to believe that not so long ago their parents had a contented life in absence of all worldly comforts. To-day the people with modern gadgetory hardly need to bend their back. They have everything at their command and control; still they are seldom satisfied. Some decades ago their parents did everything manually, yet they never felt physically or mentally tired. Gone are days when one would find a Dhobi (washer man) thrashing wet clothes on the stone slab or on the stairs of Yarbal'/Ghat. Washing machines have since stopped them from doing such manual labour. You can no longer find vegetable cultivators carrying baskets of shit on their shoulders for using it as manure. Again, use of internal heating system within households has made Kangris and hamaams obsolete. Air-conditioners have taken the place of wawej (hand fans). One can hardly find an iscle during winter as modern roofs do not allow accumulation of snow on the roof tops, while big sized Iscles abundantly hanging on lower edges of the roof ceiling was a usual scene in good olden days. Now, one can make its replica sitting inside house by operating the power system of the freezer/ fridges. Hardly fifty years back, one in lakhs owned radio or telephone set, but now mobiles, fax, television, computer/ Lap-tops with internet and broad band facility have become essential feature of every individual house hold. There is hardly a man without a mobile. Gone are the days when people gathered to

see aeroplane flying over their roof tops and astronishingly crying," Hawaeih Jehaz aaw mulki Kashmir Eymav wuch thimav korh tobh takhseer ". People can travel to any nook and corner of the world by booking tickets on mobile phone. From a simple single robe,(Pharan wore by high society people as well as poorest of the poor in early post independent era), wardrobe containing costliest and choicest stuff of suits, tailored and designed by designers of repute are the possessions of even the very ordinary people. It is in reality a change that youth of today may not feel so unusual, but for the earlier generation, especially, their parents, the change is unimaginable. Objects like, turbans, Tarangas and Kasabas have become obsolete and probably people will have no track over these terms in years to come. Retention of Karakuri caps by men folk and valuable feather caps by ladies is a mere status symbol and not a sign of culture as could be expected or thought of previously. Is it not the result of economic development over the years? Comparatively the development on such a large scale has not taken place in any other states of the country. No-doubt lanes and by-lanes are still dirty because of mud and shit running in open drains that discharge the contents in to the river. But, when you enter in to any of the residential house, you will find yourself in a different world. Cleaning of roads has been left to Municipality, who dump all the filth in the river. Evolution, people know, is a steady process, but here in valley, people have had the experience of rapid changes, of-course, in all fields' related to human activities. Developments like, universalisation of education, better and varied job prospectus with know-how and availability of most sophisticated equipments & machinary, opportunities for attaining higher technical and academic qualifications, availability of latest, low cost and quality medical facilities and last but not the least the material and economic prosperity. However, the rapid progress has also given birth to the exploitation of all sorts.Craving for becoming millioner overnight, cut throat competition, achieving one's goal at any cost, even if it meant setting aside human values, adoption of corrupt practices totally unmindful of environmental and other related problems affecting society, excessive use of natural resources, plugging water bodies, utilizing wetlands for cultivation of paddy, converting paddy land into orchards and also its encroachment for residential purposes, encroachments upon forests, hilly areas and mountains, not sparing even the catchment areas and marshy lands and excessive use of

fuel and fuel driven vehicles are the negative off shoots of this progress. (Strange but true, language that people speak has suffered neglect and distortion due to adulteration of foreign words. Original word vocabulary has become obsolete. Hardly do people find use of terms like Brahand, Damder, Daar, Pinjreh; Takuch, woobh, Gharwanghe, chookeh, Kuhth, voteh, voozeh, Brarhkani, chumteh, Krocheh, tungol, kasveh, Tathul, vokhul, kajwaath, Kanzh, Grateh, shuop, pareun, hahkoal, duollh, muteh, matheh, macheh. deghche, dhagh, leajh, tramer, choomph, chalan, cheleum, Jajeer, nhaye, wagoue, changejeh, kawpateh, dahsus, pachebarren, daan, vorheh, hureh, narehleaj, kenzeeh-koose, photh, krajeeh, phather, tooker, badrehpeeth, tokh, tabech, keeser, voroseey, longon and so on and so forth. Like wise, there has been marked change in life style, formerly, one would take food in alloy thal or copper toor (Vessels made of alloy of brass and copper plates, Thalh, Toor and tramme), placed on a small wooden low sized table, called chookh or on woolen chadher or some times on clay pasted floor either square or circular shaped patches, all these items and conventions have become things of the past. The literacy rate has gone very high. The only thing that seems not to have changed is the short-sightedness/ limited outlook, individualism, shrewdness, exploiting nature, easy going approach, biased feelings and fanaticism.

Having said all this, something more is lurking in Krishna's mind, for he is aware that all is not well so far as the health of his community is concerned. In-fact, the community suffers from a chronic ailment, which if left unattended and uncared for, may lead to devastating results. Back to 1990s, miltants had issued deaths threats to the members of this community, asking them, either to accept what miltants stood for, or leave or other-wise face death. The state machinery had altogether failed to provide any safety or security to the community. The community members at individual level had decided to leave behind all they had, including their home and heart, atleast till such time the rule of law was restored. These members lived in the hope that some day they would return to their land of birth. But they were mistaken, for their Muslim brothers had attained freedom from the culture they were taught to despise. It never meant that Muslims hated Hindus, but the religious barrier was there that could not be broken. On the other hand Hindus, who had migrated felt totally upset and dismayed and rightly so, because nobody bothered about their plight. Considering the part of the state with

undeveloped economy that these migrants had chosen as a place of their new residence, proved only a transit place as it had limited resources of livelihood and could hardly accommodate the large concentration of migrant community. Thus, it was implicitly clear that further disintegration was in the offering, but that it would take place so soon and at such a rapid pace had not been thought off. The maximum number of youths started leaving the state for getting settled in different parts of India, including foreign countries. This is where the community faced a definite challenge. After all you need a sweat home besides owning palatial houses elsewhere. Perhaps, it did not strike the community members earlier. Dilution of cultural identity implied that the end of the culture was evidently very near. Whether the community can come out of this messy situation and succeed in maintaining its identity is something that can hardly be predicted.

Despite all odds, Krishna still maintains his optimism, he is sure that even if the community were to reduce only to a few souls, it had the capacity to reproduce itself qualitatively, if not quantitatively and thus, regain its lost glory. But then, as a human being, he may also be feeling disturbed at the way thing are going, factors, like dilution of identity by way of marriages out side community, that too when Article370 is in vogue, dispersion in different directions, where the individual members have hardly any visible stake or backward pull to keep him alive socially. Thus, it would not be wrong to assume that the community has achieved nothing tangible except fiscal success, where human element is missing. People cannot call themselves achievers, if their parents are forced to live alone, uncared for and neglected in their hour of need. Youths do have their problems and more often genuine, but, there can be solution to the problems, provided they believe in sacrificing a bit. After all what is the goal of their struggle? Is it money only that they aspire for? Do they concentrate at that point alone? No, their next problem is the security of their family, which includes children. But, why do they think of the welfare of their offsprings only? Is it that they have the obligation only of performing duty of being a parent? No, there is also self-interest involved. Thus, it is a chain of interests that follows and there is also an obligation towards the society. Most of the community youths hardly bother to recall that it was the community that had contributed to their successful career. They should acknowledge the debt they owe to their parents and the community that provided

them with the identity that stood by them in good stead during post migration period. People would have starved; the children probably would not have continued their studies or admission in reputed professional and academic Institutions, had it not been for their parents and their link with community. Is it not their duty to pay back by sticking to some thing that is essential for the survival of the community and the identity that they have been benefited from? No-doubt, parents did spend money on their education and trainings, but in most of the cases it was the community that had offered them the opportunities. Why should not they feel guilty of ignoring the interests of the community that they belong to? For centuries the community remained alive despite repeated onslaughts, it continued to grow with its knowledge based resources. It is now their turn to pool in their energy to keep it alive for future as well. By resources, it never means, only pouring in finances/ donating money or giving assistance of whatever kind. In-fact, it is the fulfillment of moral obligations that community demands. Thus, the need to develop a thought process that binds the individual to the family as well as to community and country, atleast to the extent where the existence at all the levels are taken care of, is what is expected of every devoted member of the community. Let there be binding, an understanding amongst students and scholars, parents and guardians that they are to follow a path that atleast does not exhaust the community of its manpower resource. It is true that world has shrunk to a small place, but then small units like community representing an organ of the country has to remain physically alive. A modern community cannot be averse to any change, for change is the law of life, but a steady change, rather than swift transformation is the key to health of the community as well as of an individual. No change is permanent. Dynamics governs the world. Most often changes follow cyclic paths and with the change in circumstances, masters may become the servants and servants the masters. Certainly, the expectation of reversion in graph is always there. Migrants have failed to infuse the spirit of aligning themselves to their roots. Parents may take pleasure at the thought of their wards getting settled in foreign countries. They may feel satisfied with the performance of their role as parents and may have succeeded in their duty towards their wards, but they can not escape tasting the fruit of the seed they have been sowing by encouraging them with short cuts. Squeezing size of the community in recent years may be cause of concern, but then the

trend of adhering to the norms of small family system, one child per family, asks for some fresh look and amends.

Now, all those, who are concerned with the return of internally displaced people to their land of birth, should know that achieving the goal may not be as impossible as the community is made to believe. Difficulties can never deter their determination. Those who have been on the side of perpetrators, they can not hood-wink every one every time. However, keeping nourishing on such thoughts and then feelings alone and helpless would not do. Need of the hour is to stand up, keep petty interests in the back yard and feel pleasure in contributing towards achieving the goal that future has set ready for the community. Let the people deal effectively with those who obviously want to push this community to obscurity. Let the displaced people ask for what they are entitled to in any welfare state, a secular state. The people at the helm of affairs should be told in clear terms that they need a home, a home in safe environment with all the requisite facilities, so that they can live and spend their earnings and boast the economy of the place. Instead of making false promises and pushing the community to further disintregation, the state should feel obliged in getting them resettled in the valley on a piece of land of their choice, where no right thinking person is denied justics on the bases of religion and that the rule of law prevails. It is perhaps the right time that solution to this multi-dimensional problem is sought with sincere intentions even if it involves division of state into smaller administrative units for efficient functioning and speedy development of the state. (Jai Hind)

Aspiring for a new beginning



Temple site in valley depicting acts of desecration



One of the views of Mansbal Lake



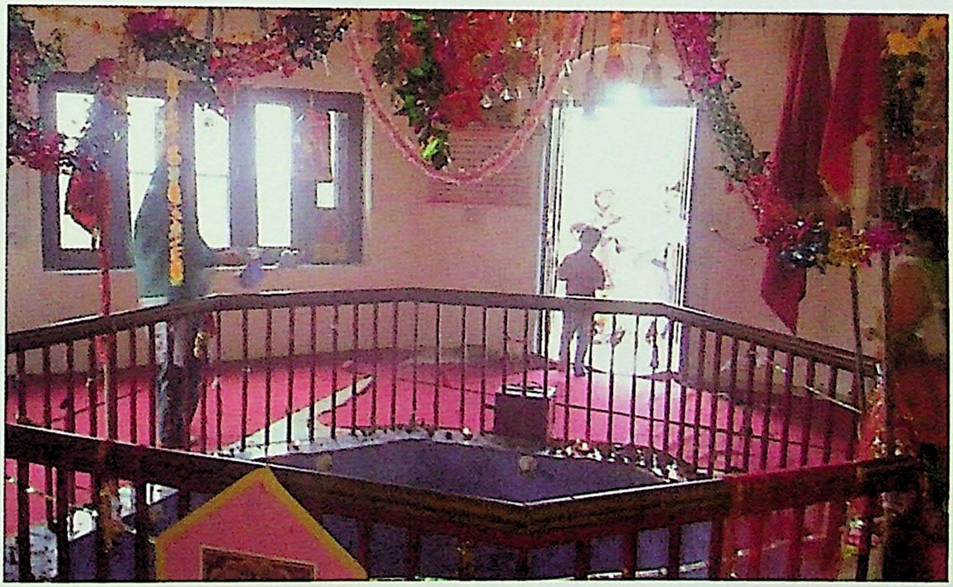
Outer kund of Anantnag Nagbal



Act of Temple descecration Dist. Anantnag



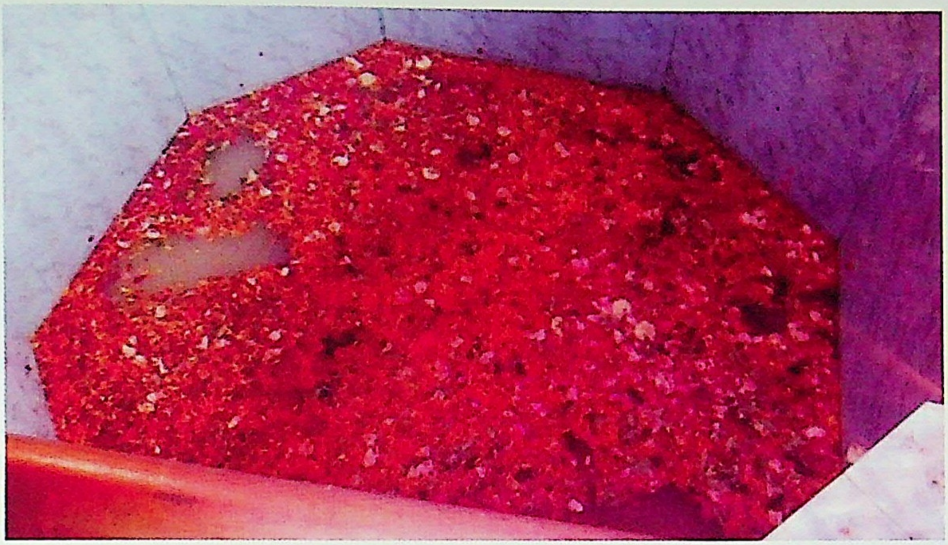
Crystal clear water, Kokernag



Holy spring inside Temple of Kheer Bhawani Manzgam



Kulashourie in Kulgam Kheer Bhawani Manzgam



Holy spring Kheer Bhawani Manzgam



Ancient script engraved on rock in the valley at Martand Surya Temple



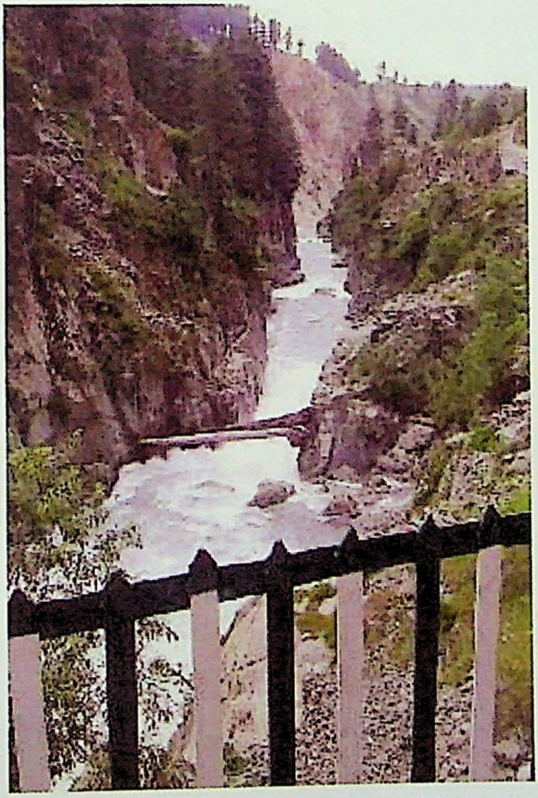
Surya Temple in Martand



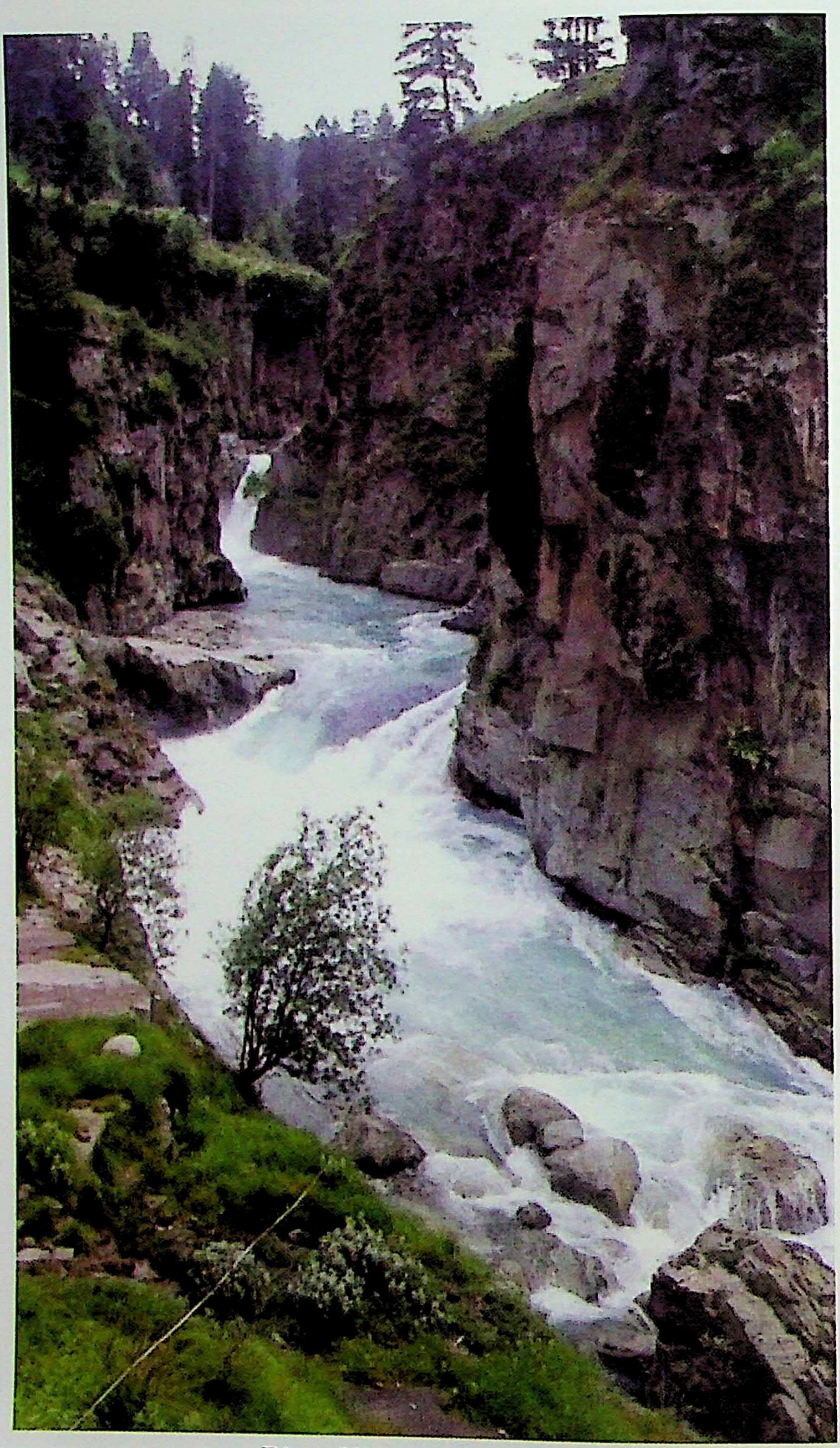
Pandav dull on the bank of river Vishav at Aherbal



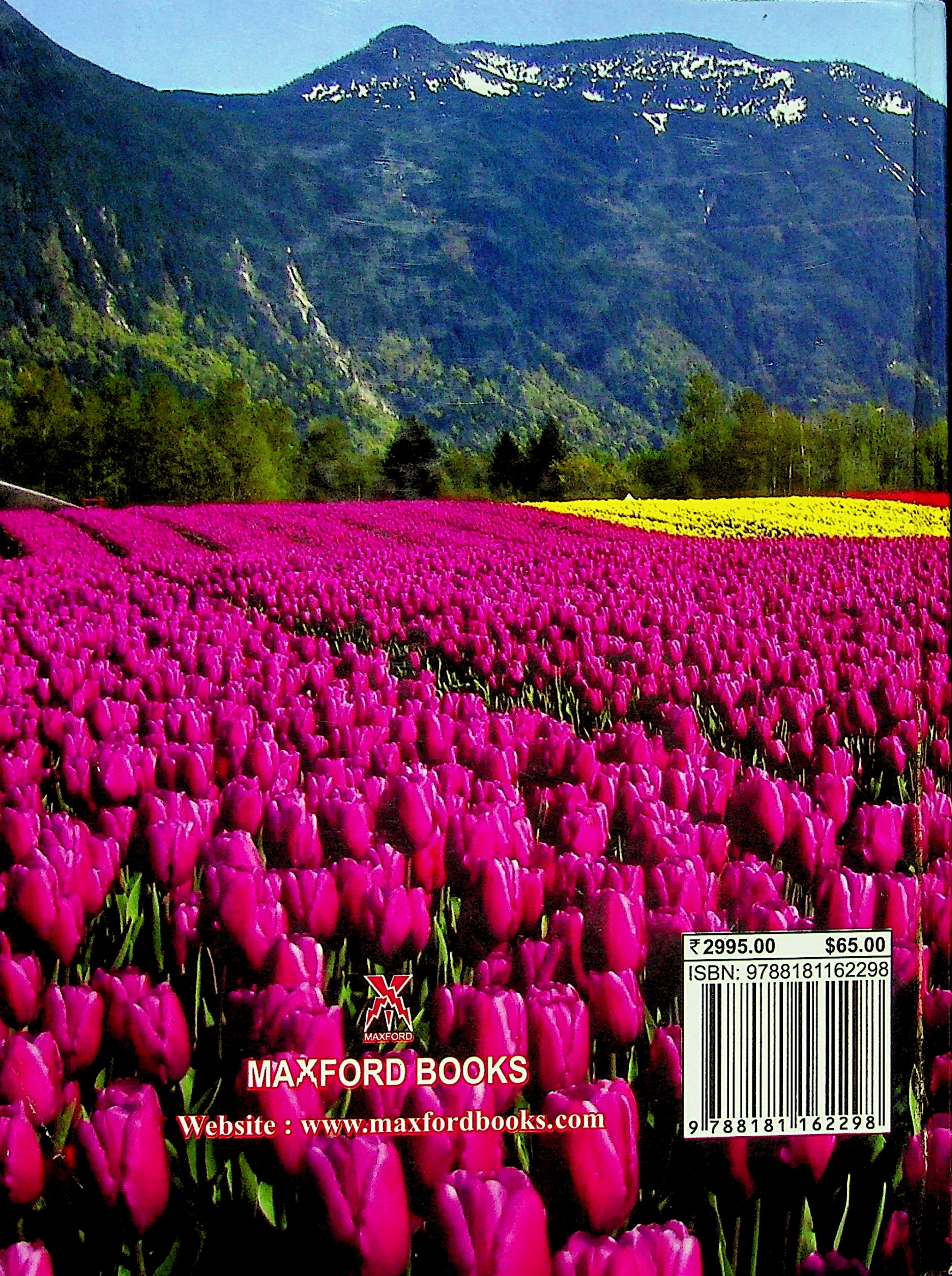
Koker-Nag



A dancing brook originating from Kowsar Nag, river Vishav at Aherbal



River Vishav at Aherbal



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